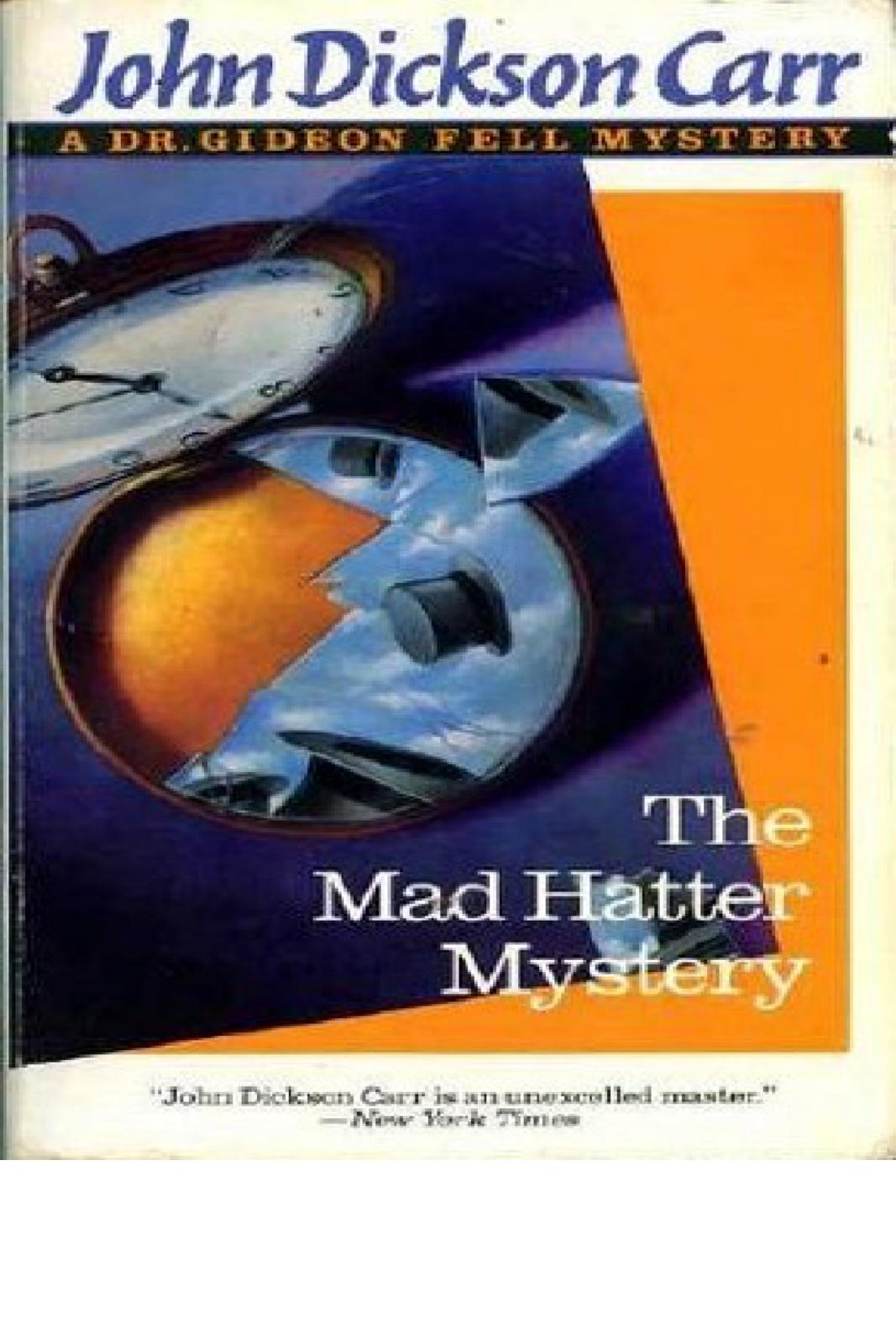


John Dickson Carr

A DR. GIDEON FELL MYSTERY



The Mad Hatter Mystery

"John Dickson Carr is an unequalled master."
—New York Times

14. 'To Die in a Top-Hat' 145

15. *The Affair of the Rubber Mouse* 157

16. *What was Left in the Fireplace* 168

17. *Death at Bitton House* 177

18. *Mr Arbor Hears a Voice* 186

19. *Under the Bloody Tower?* 193

20. *The Murderer Speaks* 203

21. *Unsolved*

I

A Cab Horse in a Barrister's Wig

IT BEGAN, like most of Dr Fell's adventures, in a bar. It dealt with the reason why a man was found dead on the steps of Traitors' Gate, at the Tower of London, and with the odd headgear of this man in the golf suit. That was the worst part of it. The whole case threatened for a time to become a nightmare of hats.

Abstractly considered, there is nothing very terrifying about a hat. We may pass a shop-window full of them without the slightest qualm. We may even see a policeman's helmet decorating the top of a lamp-post, with no more than an impression that some practical joker is exercising a primitive sense of humour. Young Rampole, when he saw the newspaper, was inclined to grin at the matter as just that.

Chief Inspector Hadley was not so sure.

They were waiting for Dr Fell at Scott's, a tavern in the heart of Piccadilly Circus. Sitting in an alcove with a glass of beer, Rampole studied the chief inspector. He was wondering. He had only arrived from America that morning, and the press of events seemed rather sudden.

He said: 'I've often wondered, sir, about Dr Fell. He seems to be all sorts of things.'

The other nodded, smiling faintly. You could not, Rampole felt, help liking the chief inspector of the C.I.D. He was the sort of man who might be described as compact; very neatly dressed, with a military

moustache and smooth hair the colour of dull steel. If there was a quality about him you noticed at once, it was a quality of repose, of quiet watchfulness.

‘Have you known him long?’ Hadley asked.

‘As a matter of fact, only since last July.’ The American found himself rather startled to remember that. ‘Good Lord!

it seems years! He ... well, in a manner of speaking, he introduced me to my wife.’

Hadley nodded. ‘I know. That would be the Starberth case. He wired me from Lincolnshire, and I sent the men he wanted.’

A little more than eight months ago .. Rampole looked back on those terrifying scenes in the Hag's Nook, and the twilight by the railway station where Dr Fell had put his hand on the shoulder of Martin Starberth's murderer. Now there were only happiness and Dorothy.

Again the chief inspector smiled faintly. ‘And you, I believe,’ he continued in his deliberate voice, ‘carried off the young lady. I hear glowing reports of you from Fell ... He did rather a brilliant piece of work in that affair,’ Hadley added abruptly. ‘I wonder ... ’

‘Whether he can do it again?’

The other's expression grew quizzical. ‘Not so fast please. You seem to be scenting crime again.’

‘Well, sir, he wrote me a note to meet you here. ..’

‘And,’ said Hadley, ‘you may be right. I have a feeling.’ He touched a folded newspaper in his pocket, hesitated and frowned. ‘Still, I thought that this thing’ might be rather more in his line than mine. Bitton appealed to me personally, as a friend, and it's hardly a job for the Yard. I don't want to turn him down. I suppose you've heard of Sir-William Bitton ?’

‘The collector??

‘Ah,’ said Hadley, ‘I fancied you would. Fell said it would be in your line, too. The book-collector, yes, Though I knew him better before he retired from politics.’ He glanced at his watch. ‘He should be here by two o'clock, and so should Fell.’

A thunderous voice boomed, 'AHA!' They were conscious of somebody flourishing a cane at them across the room, and of a great bulk filling the stairway to the street. The only other occupants of the room were two business men conversing in low tones in one corner, and they jerked round to

stare at the beaming appearance of Gideon Fell.

All the old genial days, all the beer-drinking and fiery moods and table-pounding conversations, beamed back at Rampole in the person of Dr Fell. The American felt like calling for another drink and striking up a song for sheer joyousness. There was the doctor, bigger and stouter than ever. He wheezed. His red face shone, and his small eyes twinkled over eyeglasses on a broad black ribbon. There was a grin under his bandit's moustache, and chuckling upheavals animated his several chins. On his head was the inevitable black shovel hat; his paunch projected from a voluminous black cloak.

'Heh,', he said. 'Heh-heh-heh.' He came rolling over to the alcove and wrung Rampole's hand. 'My boy, I'm delighted. Delighted! Heh. I say, you're' looking fine. And Dorothy?

.. Excellent; I'm glad to hear it. My wife sends her warmest regards'

There are people before whom you instantly unbend. Dr Fell was one of them. No constraint could exist before him; he blew it away with a superb puff ; and, if you had any affectations, you forgot them immediately. Hadley looked indulgent, and beckoned a waiter.

'This might interest you,' the chief inspector suggested, handing Dr Fell a wine-card. He assumed a placid, innocent air. 'The cocktails are recommended. There is one called an "Angel's Kiss"

'Hah?' said Dr Fell, starting in his seat.

'or a "Love's Delight"-'

'Gunk!' said Dr Fell. He stared at the card. 'Young man, do you serve these?'

'Yes, sir,' said the waiter, jumping involuntarily.

'Young man,' continued the doctor, rumbling and polishing his glasses, 'have you never reflected on what American influence has done to stalwart England ? Where are your finer instincts? This is enough to make decent tipplers shudder.'

'I think you'd better order something,' suggested Hadley.

'A large glass of beer,' said the doctor. 'Lager.'

Snorting he produced his cigar-case and offered it round as the waiter took away the glasses. But with the first healing puffs of smoke he settled himself back benignly against the alcove.

'My young friend here will tell you, Hadley,' Dr Fell rumbled, making an immense gesture with his cigar, 'that I have been working for seven years on the materials of my book, *The Drinking Customs of England from the Earliest Days*, and I blush to have to include such manifestations as these, even in the appendix. They sound almost bad enough to be soft drinks. I ...'

He paused, small eyes blinking over his glasses. A quiet, impeccably dressed man, who seemed like a manager of some sort, was hesitating near their alcove. He appeared to be ill-at-ease, and feeling slightly ridiculous. But he was contemplating Dr Fell's very picturesque shovel hat which lay across the cloak on a chair. As the waiter brought three rounds of beer, this man entered the alcove.

'Excuse me, sir,' he said, 'but may I make a suggestion? If I were you, I should be very careful of this hat.'

The doctor stared at him for a moment, his glass halfway to his lips. Then a bright and pleased expression animated his red face.

'Permit me, sir,' he requested earnestly, 'to shake your hand. You are, I perceive, a person of sound taste and judgement. I wish you could talk to my wife on this matter. It is, I agree, an excellent hat. But why should I exercise more than my usual care in guarding it?'

The man's face was growing pink. He said stiffly: 'I had no wish to intrude, sir. I thought you knew ... That is to say, there have been several such outrages in this vicinity, and I did not wish to have our patrons incommoded. That hat - well, hang it!' the manager exploded, volplaning down into honest speech, 'that thing would be too much. He couldn't miss. The Hatter would be bound to steal it.'

'Who?'

'The Hatter, sir. The Mad Hatter.'

Hadley's mouth was twitching back, and he seemed about to burst out laughing or leave the table in haste. But Dr Fell did not notice. He

took out a large handkerchief and wiped his forehead.

'My dear sir,' he said, 'this is most refreshing. Let me see if I follow you. Am I to understand that there is in this neighbourhood a hatter of such notoriously unbalanced mind that, as I walk innocently past his shop, he would be apt to dash into the street and steal my hat? That is carrying the aesthetic sense too far. I must courteously but firmly refuse,' continued Dr Fell, raising his voice warmly, 'to run up Piccadilly pursued by impassioned hatters.'

The chief inspector said sharply to the manager: 'Thank you very much. This gentleman has just arrived in London; he knows nothing about it. I can explain.'

As the red-faced manager hurried towards the restaurant, Dr Fell sighed.

'Now you've driven him away,' he protested, querulously, 'and I was just beginning to enjoy it. I perceive among London hatters a bustling, up-to-the-minute, go-get-'em spirit.' He took a deep drink of beer, and shook his great head of hair like a mane. Then he beamed on his companions.

'Blast you . . . ' said the chief inspector. He struggled with dignity, and lost. 'Oh well. Confound it, I hate scenes, and you seem to revel in them. All the same, he was talking perfect sense. It's a kid's prank, of course. But it keeps on and on. If he'd stopped at stealing one or two hats, and this infernal newspaper ragging hadn't begun, no harm would have been done. But it's making us look foolish.'

The doctor adjusted his glasses.

'Do you mean to say,' he demanded, 'that a real hatter is going about London stealing... '

"Mad Hatter" is what the newspapers call him. It was started by this young cub Driscoll, the free-lance. Driscoll is Bitton's nephew; it would be difficult to muzzle him, and if we did try to muzzle him we should look foolish. He's doing the damage ... Laugh, by all means!' Hadley invited.

Dr Fell lowered his chins into his collar.

'And Scotland Yard, he asked, with suspicious politeness, 'is unable to apprehend this villainous... .'

Hadley retained his repose with an effort. Hadley said, in a quiet voice: 'I don't give a damn, personally, if he steals the Archbishop of Canterbury's mitre. But the effect of a police force's being laughed at is not at all humorous. Besides, suppose we catch him? To the newspapers the trial would be much funnier than the offence.' Can you imagine two stolen wigged counsel battling as to whether the defendant did, or did not, on the evening of March 5, 1932, abstract the helmet of Police Constable Thomas Sparkle from the head of the said constable in or about the premises of Euston Road, and did thereafter elevate the said helmet to the top of a lamp-standard before the premises of New Scotland Yard, SW - or whatever they say?'

'Did he do that?' Dr Fell queried, with interest.

'Read it,' said Hadley, and drew the newspaper from his pocket. 'That's young Driscoll's column. It's the worst, but the others are almost as facetious.'

Dr Fell grunted. 'I say, Hadley, this isn't the case you wanted to talk to me about, is it? Because, if it is, I'm damned if I help you. Why man, it's glorious!'

Hadley was not amused. 'That,' he answered, coldly, 'is not the case. But out of what I have on hand, I hope to put a brake on Driscoll. Unless . . .' He hesitated, turning something over in his mind. 'Read it. It will probably delight you

HAT-FIEND STRIKES AGAIN!

Is There a Political Significance in the Movements of the Sinister Master Mind?

BY PHILIP C. DRISCOLL,

our special correspondent in charge of the latest Mad Hatter atrocities.

London, March 12.

Not since the days of Jack the Ripper has this city been so terrorized by a mysterious fiend who strikes and vanishes without a clue, as in the exploits of the diabolical criminal genius known as the Mad Hatter. On Sunday morning fresh exploits of the Mad Hatter challenged the best brains of Scotland Yard. passing the, cab-rank on the east side of Leicester Square about 5 A.M., P.C. James McGuire was struck by a somewhat unusual circumstance. A hansom-cab was

drawn up at the kerb, from which certain not untuneful noises indicated that the driver was asleep inside. The horse (whose name has subsequently been ascertained to be Jennifer) was chewing a large stick of peppermint and looking benevolently upon P.C. McGuire. What, especially, struck the quick-witted policeman, however, was the fact that on her head Jennifer wore a large white wig with flowing sides: in fact, a barrister's wig.

Though some caution was manifested in taking steps when Mr McGuire reported to Vine Street Police Station the presence of a horse in a barrister's wig eating peppermint in Leicester Square, ultimate investigation proved it true. It became obvious that the Hat-Fiend was again at large.

Readers of the Daily Recorder are, already aware how, on the preceding day, a beautiful pearl-grey top-hat was discovered on the head of one of the lions on the Nelson Monument in Trafalgar Square, looking towards Whitehall. By its inscription it was found to belong to Sir Isaac Simonides Levy, of Curzon Street, the well-known member of the Stock Exchange. Under, cover of a light mist, that cloak of evildoers, it had been twitched from Sir Isaac's head as he was leaving his home the preceding evening to address a meeting of the Better Orphans' League. It will be obvious that Sir Isaac, in a pearl-grey top-hat for evening wear, was (at the least) conspicuous.

The origin of the wig on Jennifer's head was, therefore, clear to the authorities. At the present moment its owner has not been ascertained, nor has he come forward. Detectives believe that the Mad Hatter must have been near the cab-rank only, a few moments before the arrival of P.C. McGuire, inasmuch as the stick of peppermint was scarcely a third gone when the policeman first saw her. It is further inferred that the criminal was well acquainted with Leicester Square, and probably with the horse Jennifer, since he took advantage of her liking for peppermints to place the wig upon her head. Beyond this, the police have little to work on....

‘There's more of it,’ Hadley said, when he saw Dr Fell fold over the paper at this point, ‘but it doesn't matter. I hate this damned ragging, that's all.’

‘Undoubtedly,’ said Dr Fell, sadly, ‘you police are a persecuted lot. And no clue, I suppose. I'm sorry I can't take the case. Perhaps, though, if you sent your best men to all the sweet-shops near Leicester Square, and inquire who bought...’

'I didn't bring you down from Chatterham,' Hadley retorted, with asperity, 'to talk about an undergraduate prank. But I may stop this young pup Driscoll from writing such tosh; and that will stop the rest of them. I wired you that it had something to do with Bitton; Bitton is this boy's uncle, and holds the purse strings.... One of the most valuable manuscripts in Bitton's collection, he tells me, has been stolen.'

'Ah,' said Dr Fell. He put aside the paper, and sat back with his arms folded.

'The devil about these thefts of manuscripts or rare books,' Hadley continued, 'is that you can't trace them like an ordinary theft. In the case of precious stones, or plate, or even pictures, it's fairly simple. We know our pawnshops and our receivers of stolen goods too well. But you can't do it with books or manuscripts. When a thief takes something like that, he has a definite person in mind to whom he intends to dispose of it; or else he's acting under the buyer's orders, to begin with. In any case, you can be sure the buyer won't tell.'

The chief inspector paused.

'And the Yard's intervention in the matter is further complicated by the fact that the manuscript stolen from Bitton was one to which he had well, a rather dubious right himself.'

'I see,' murmured the doctor. 'And what was it?'

Hadley picked up his glass slowly, and set it down hastily. Feet clattered on the brass stair-rod. A tall man in a flapping greatcoat strode down into the room ; the bartender drew a deep breath, resignedly, and tried not to notice the wild look in the stranger's eye. The bartender murmured, 'Good afternoon, Sir William,' and returned to polishing glasses.

'It's not a good afternoon,' Sir William Bitton announced, violently. He passed the end of his white scarf across his face, moist from the thickening mist outside, and glared. 'Ah, hallo, Hadley ! Now, look here, something's got to be done. I tell you I won't...' He strode into the alcove, and his eye fell on the paper Dr Fell had discarded. 'So you're reading about that swine who steals hats?'

'Quite, quite,' said Hadley, looking about nervously. 'Sit down, man! What's he done to you?'

'What's he done?' inquired Sir William, with deadly politeness. He

raised the forelock of his white hair. 'You can see for yourself what he's done. Right in front of my house - car standing there - chauffeur down buying cigarettes. I went out to it. Misty in the square. Saw what I thought was a sneak-thief putting his hand into the side pocket of the car door through the window in the tonneau. I said, "Hi!" and jumped on the running board. Then the swine shot out his hand and...'

Sir William gulped.

'I had three appointments this afternoon before I came here; two of 'em in the City. Even going to make monthly calls. Call on Lord Tarlotts. Call on my nephew. Call - Never mind. But I couldn't and wouldn't go anywhere, because I hadn't got one. And I was damned if I'd pay three guineas for a third one that swine might ... What's he done?' bellowed Sir William, breaking off again. 'He's stolen my hat, that's what he's done! And it's the second hat he's stolen from me in three days!'

2 Manuscripts and Murder

HADLEY rapped on the table. 'A double whisky here,' he said to the waiter. 'Now sit down and calm yourself. People think this is a madhouse already... And let me introduce you to some friends of mine.'

'D'ye do?' said the other, grudgingly, and bobbed his head at the introductions. He resumed in his high, argumentative voice as he sat down. 'The only reason I came here was because I'd got to see you if I'd had to come without my boots. Ha. No other hat in the house. Just bought two new hats last week - top-hat and Homburg. And Saturday night this maniac pinched the top-hat, and this afternoon he got the Homburg. By God ! I won't have it ! I tell you - He glared round as the waiter appeared. 'Eli? - Oh, Whisky.' Just a splash.'

Spluttering, he sat back to take a drink, and Rampole studied him. Everybody knew, by hearsay of this man's fiery humours. Jingo newspapers frequently dwelt on his career: how he had begun in a draper's shop at the age of eighteen, become a whip in Parliament at forty-two, managed the armament policy of one Government, and had gone down still battling for a bigger navy in the peace reaction after the war. He had been the prince of jingoes; his speeches were full of reference to Drake, the long-bow, and hurrah for old England; and he still wrote letters vilifying the present Prime Minister. Now Rampole saw a man hardly past his prime at seventy: wiry, vigorous, with a long neck thrust out of his wing collar, and uncannily shrewd blue

eyes.

Suddenly Sir William put down his glass and stared at Dr Fell with narrowed eyes. 'Excuse me, he said, in his jerky but wonderfully clear fashion, 'I didn't catch your name at first. Dr Gideon Fell? - Ah, I thought so. I have been wanting to meet you, I have your work on the history of the supernatural in English fiction. But this damned business about hats ...'

Hadley said, brusquely 'I think we've heard quite enough about hats, for the moment. You understand that according to the story you told me we can't take official cognizance of it at the Yard. That's why I've summoned Dr Fell. There's no time to go into it now, but he has helped us before. I am not one of those fools who distrust amateurs. And it is particularly in his line. All the same . . .'

The chief inspector was troubled. Suddenly he drew a long breath. Evenly he continued:

'Gentlemen, neither am I one of those fools who call themselves thoroughly practical men. A moment ago I said we had heard quite enough about hats; and before I saw Sir William I thought so. But this second theft of his hat has it occurred to you that in some fashion (I do not pretend to understand it) this may relate to the theft of the manuscript?'

'It had occurred to me, of course,' Dr Fell rumbled, beckoning the waiter and pointing to his empty glass, 'that the theft of the hats was more than an undergraduate prank. It's quite possible that some scatter-brained chap might want to collect stolen hats a policeman's helmet, a barristers wig, any sort of picturesque headgear he could proudly display to his friends. I noticed the same habit when I was teaching in America, among the students. There it ran to signs and signboards of all kinds to decorate the walls of their rooms.

'But this is a different thing, you see. This chap isn't a lunatic collector. He steals the hat and props it up somewhere else, like a symbol, for everybody to see. There's one other explanation, nonetheless. . .'

Sir William's thin lips wore a wintry smile as he glanced from Rampole to the absorbed face of the doctor; but shrewd calculation moved his eyes.

'You're a quaint parcel of detectives,' he said. 'Are you seriously suggesting that a thief begins pinching hats all over London so that he

can pinch a manuscript from me? Do you think I'm in the habit of carrying valuable manuscripts around in my hat? Besides, I might point out that it was stolen several days before either one of my hats.'

Dr Fell ruffled his big dark mane with a thoughtful hand. 'The repetition of that word "hat",' he observed, 'has rather a confusing effect. I'm afraid I shall say "hat" when I mean almost anything else...: Suppose you tell us about the manuscript first - what was it, and how did you get it, and when was it stolen?'

'I'll tell you what it was,' Sir William answered, in a low voice, 'because Hadley vouches for you. Only one collector in the world - no, say two - know that I found it. One of them had to know; I had to show it to him to make sure it was genuine. The other I'll speak of presently. But I found it.'

'It is the manuscript of a completely unknown story by Edgar Allan Poe. Myself and one other person excepted, nobody except Poe has ever seen or heard of it.... Find that hard to believe, do you?'

There was a frosty pleasure in his look, and he chuckled without opening his mouth.

'I've never collected Poe manuscripts. But I have a first edition of the Al Araaf collection, published by subscription while he was at West Point, and a few copies of the Southern Literary Messenger he edited in Baltimore. Well! - I was poking about for odds and ends in the States last September, and I happened to be visiting Dr Masters, the Philadelphia collector. He suggested that I have a look at the house where Poe lived there, at the corner of Seventh and Spring Garden Streets. I did. I went alone. And a jolly good thing I did.'

'It was a mean neighbourhood, dull brick fronts and washing hung in gritty backyards. The house was at the corner of an alley, and I could hear a man in a garage swearing at a back-firing motor. Very little about the house had been changed.'

'From the alley I went through a gate in a high board fence, and into a paved yard with a crooked tree growing through the bricks. In a little brick kitchen a glum-looking workman was making some notations on an envelope; there was a noise of hammering from the front room. I excused myself; I said that the house used to be occupied by a writer I had heard of, and I was looking round. He growled

to go ahead, and went on ciphering. So I went to the other room. You know the type; small and low-ceilinged; cupboards set flush with

the wall, and papered over, on either side of a low black mantelpiece.'

Sir William Bitton obviously saw that he had caught his audience, and it was clear from his mannerisms and pauses that he enjoyed telling a story.

'They were altering the cupboards. The cupboards, mind you.' He bent forward suddenly. 'And again - a jolly good thing they took out the inner framework instead of just putting up plaster-board and papering them out. There was a cloud of dust and mortar in the place. Two workmen were just bumping down the framework, and I saw ...'

'Gentlemen, I went cold and shaky all over. It had been shoved down between the edges of the framework: thin sheets of paper, spotted with damp, and folded twice lengthwise. It was like a revelation, for when I had pushed open - the gate, and first saw those workmen altering the house, I thought: Suppose I were to find ... Well, I confess I almost lunged past those men. One of them said, "What the hell!" and almost dropped the frame. One glance at the handwriting, what I could make out of it, was enough; you know that distinctive curly line beneath the title in Poe's MSS., and the fashioning of the E. A. Poe?

'But I had to be careful. I didn't know the owner of the house; and he might know the value of this. If I offered the workmen money to let me have it, I must be careful not to offer too much, or they would grow suspicious and insist on more....'

Sir William smiled tightly. 'I explained it was something of sentimental interest to a man who had lived here before. And I said, "Look here, I'll give you ten dollars for this." Even at that, they were suspicious; I think they had some idea of buried -treasure, or directions for finding it, or something. The ghost of Poe, would have enjoyed that.' Again that chuckle behind the closed teeth. Sir William swept out his arm.

'But they looked over it, and saw that it was only - "a kind of a story, or some silly damn thing, with long words at the beginning." Finally they compromised at twenty dollars, and I took the manuscript away

'As you may know, the leading authorities on Poe are Professor Hervey. Allen of New York and Dr Robertson of Baltimore. I knew Robertson, and took my find to him. First I made him promise that, no, matter what I showed him, he would never mention it to anybody.'

Rampole was watching the chief inspector. During the recital Hadley had become - not precisely bored, but restive and impatient.

'But why, keep it a secret?' he demanded. 'If there, was any trouble about your right, you were at least first claimant; you could have; bought it. And you'd made what you say, is a great discovery.'

Sir William stared at him, and then shook his head. 'You don't understand,' he replied at length. 'And I can't: explain. I wanted no trouble. I wanted this great thing, a secret between Poe and myself, for myself. For nobody else to see unless I chose.'

A sort of pale fierceness was in his face; the orator was at a loss for words to explain something powerful and intangible.

'At any rate, Robertson is a man of honour. He promised, and he will keep; his, promise, even though he urged me to do as you say, Hadley. But, naturally, I refused... . Gentlemen, the manuscript was what I thought; it was even better.'

'And what was it?' Dr Fell asked, rather sharply.

Sir William opened his lips, and then hesitated.

'One moment, gentlemen. It is not that I do not - ah - trust you. Of course not. Ha! But so much I have told openly, to strangers. Excuse me. I prefer to keep my secret a bit longer. Well enough to tell you what it was when you have heard my story of the theft, and decide whether you can help me.'

There was a curious expression on Dr Fell's face; not contemptuous, not humorous, not bored, but a mixture of the three.

'Suppose, you tell us,' he suggested, 'the facts of the theft, and whom you suspect!'

'It was taken from my house in Berkeley Square at sometime between Saturday afternoon and Sunday -morning. Adjoining my bedroom upstairs I have a dressing-room which I use a good deal as a study. The greater part of my collection is, of course, downstairs in the library and my study there. I had been examining the manuscript in my upstairs study on Saturday afternoon.. '

'Was it locked up?' Hadley inquired.

'No. Nobody - at least, so I thought - knew of it, and I saw no reason

for unusual precautions. It was merely in a drawer of my desk.'

'What about the members of your household? Did they know of it?'

Sir William jerked his head down in a sort of bow. 'I'm glad you asked that, Hadley. Don't think I shall take um brage at the suggestion; but I couldn't make it myself. At least - not immediately. Naturally I don't suspect them; ha!'

'Naturally,' said the inspector, placidly. 'Well?'

'At the present, my household consists of my daughter Sheila, my brother Lester, and his wife. My nephew by marriage, Philip, has a flat of his own, but he generally eats Sunday dinner with us. That is all - with the exception of one guest, Mr Julius Arbor, the American collector.'

Sir William examined his finger nails. There was a pause.

'As to who knew about it,' he resumed, waving a careless hand ; 'my family knew that I had brought back a valuable manuscript with me, of course. But none of them is in the least interested in such matters, and the mere words, "another manuscript," was sufficient explanation!'

'And Mr Arbor?'

Sir William said, evenly: 'I had intended to show it to him. He has a fine collection of Poe first editions. But I had not mentioned it!'

'Go on,' said Hadley, stolidly.

'As I have said, I was examining the manuscript on Saturday afternoon; fairly early. Later I went to the Tower of London...'

'To the Tower of London?'

'A very old friend of mine, General Mason, is deputy governor there. He and his secretary have done some very fine research into the Tower records. They wanted me to see a recently discovered record dealing with Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex. I returned home, dined alone, and afterwards went to the theatre. I did not go into my study then, and after the theatre it was rather late; so I turned in immediately. I discovered the theft on Sunday morning. There was no attempt at burglarious entry at any time ; all the windows were locked, and nothing else in the house had been touched.'

'Was the drawer locked?' Hadley asked. 'No.'

'I see. What did you do then?'

'I summoned my valet,' Sir William's bony fingers rapped flatly on the table; he twisted his long neck, and several times started to speak before he resumed. 'And I must confess, Hadley, that I was at first suspicious of him. He was a new man; he had been in my employ only a few months. He had the closest access to my rooms and could prowl as he liked without suspicion. But - well, he seemed too earnest, too dog-like, too thoroughly stupid at anything beyond his immediate duties. He was obviously upset and tongue-tied when I questioned him later, but that was a product of his natural dullness.'

'And his story?'

'He had no story,' Sir William said, irritably. 'He had noticed nothing suspicious, seen nothing whatever. I had difficulty getting it through his head how important the thing was; even what I was looking for. It was the same thing with the rest of the servants. They had noticed nothing.'

'What about the members of the - household?'

'My daughter Sheila had been out all Saturday afternoon. When she returned, she was in the house only a short time, and then she went out to dinner with the chap she's engaged to. . . . General Mason's secretary, by the way. My brother Lester and his wife were visiting friends in the west of England; they only returned on Sunday evening. Philip -

Philip Driscoll, my nephew - comes to see us only on Sundays. Consequently, nobody noticed anything suspicious at the time the manuscript could have been stolen.'

'And this - Mr Arbor?' The other reflected, rubbing his dry hands together.

'A very fine chap,' he answered. 'Reserved, scholarly, a trifle sardonic at times. Quite a young man, I should say scarcely more than forty - Ah, what were you asking? Mr Arbor, yes. Unfortunately, he was not in a position to observe. An American friend of his had invited him to the country for the week-end. He left on Saturday, and did not return until this morning. . . . That's true, by the way,' he added, dropping into normal speech and almost leering across the table; 'I phoned up about it.'

Hadley nodded. He seemed to be debating something.

‘I’ve brought you in a consulting expert,’ he said slowly; nodding towards the doctor. ‘Dr Fell has come some little distance as a favour to me. Hence I shall wash my hand: of the business, unless you should find the thief and want to prosecute. But I should like to ask a favour it return.’

‘A favour?’ Sir William repeated. ‘Good God! yes, of course! Anything, in reason, I mean.’

‘You spoke of your nephew, Mr Driscoll . . . ‘Philip? Yes. What about him?’

‘- who writes for the newspapers .. ‘

‘Oh, ah. Yes. At least, he tries to. I’ve exerted considerable influence to get him a real position on a newspaper. Bah! Between ourselves, the editors tell me he can turn out a good story, but he hasn’t any news sense. Harbottle says he would walk through rice an inch deep in front of St Margaret’s and never guess there’d been a wedding. So he’s freelancing’

Hadley turned an expressionless face and picked up the newspaper on the table. He was just about to speak when a waiter, hurried to his side, glanced at him nervously, and whispered.

‘Eh?’ said the chief inspector. ‘Speak louder, man! ... Yes, that’s my name.. Right. Thanks.’ He drained his glass and looked sharply at his companions. ‘That’s damned funny. I told them not to get in touch with me unless. Excuse me for a moment.’

‘What’s the matter?’ inquired Dr Fell. ‘Phone. Back in a moment’

They were silent as Hadley followed the waiter. In Hadley’s look there had been a startled uneasiness which gave Rampole a shock....

He returned in less than two minutes, and Rampole felt something tighten in his throat. The chief inspector did not hurry he was as quiet and deliberate as ever; but his footfalls sounded louder on the tiled floor, and under the bright lights his face was pale.

Stopping a moment at the bar, he spoke a few words and then returned to the table.

‘I’ve ordered you all a drink,’ he said slowly. ‘A whisky. It’s just

three minutes until closing time, and then we shall have to go.'

'Go?' repeated Sir William. 'Go where?'

Hadley did not speak until the waiter had brought the drinks and left the table. Then he said, 'Good luck!' hastily drank a little whisky, and set the glass down with care. Again Rampole was conscious of that tightening sense of terror....

'Sir William,' Hadley, went on, looking at the other levelly, 'I hope you will prepare yourself for a shock:

'Yes?' said the knight.

'We were speaking a moment ago of your nephew.'

'Yes? Well, good God! What about him?'

'I'm afraid I must tell you that he is dead. He has just been found at the Tower of London. There is reason to believe that he was murdered.'

The foot of Sir William's glass rattled on the polished table-top. He did not move; his eyes were fixed steadily and rather glassily on Hadley, and he seemed to have stopped breathing. At last he said, with an effort.

'I - I have my, car here.... '

'There is also reason to believe,' Hadley went on, 'that what we thought a practical joke has turned into murder.'

Sir William, your nephew is wearing a golf suit. And on the head of his dead body, somebody has put your stolen top hat.'

3 The Body at Traitors' Gate

THE Tower of London....

Over the White Tower flew the banner of the three Norman lions, when William the Conqueror reigned, and above the Thames its ramparts gleamed white with stone quarried at Caen. And on this spot, a thousand years before the Domesday Book, Roman sentinels cried the hours of the night from Divine Julius's Tower!'

Richard of the Lion's Heart widened the moat about a squat grey fortress, fourteen acres ringed with the strength of inner and outer

ballium walls. Here rode the kings, stiff-kneed in iron and scarlet ; amiable Henry, and Edward, Hammer of the Scots ; and the cross went before them to Westminster, and the third Edward bent to pick up a lady's garter, and Becket's lonely ghost prowled through St Thomas's Tower.

A palace, a fortress, a prison. Until Charles Stuart came back from exile it was the home of the kings, and it remains a royal palace to-day. Bugles sound before Waterloo Barracks, where once the tournaments were held, and you will hear the wheel and stamp of the Guards.

On certain dull and chilly days there creeps from the Thames a smoky- vapour which is not light enough to be called mist nor thick enough to be called fog. The rumble of traffic is muffled on Tower Hill. In the uncertain light, battlements stand up ghostly above the brutish curve of the round-towers; boat whistles hoot and echo mournfully from the river ; and the rails of the iron fence round the dry moat become the teeth of a prison....

Rampole had visited the Tower before. He had seen it in the grace of summer, when grass and trees mellow the aisles between the walls. But he could visualize what it would be like now. The imaginings grew on him during that interminable ride in Sir William's car between Piccadilly Circus and the Tower.

When he thought about it afterwards, he knew that those last words Hadley spoke were the most horrible he had ever heard. It was not so much that a man had been found dead at the Tower of London. He had eaten horrors with a wide spoon during those days of the Starberth case in Lincolnshire. But a corpse in a golfing suit, on which some satanic hand had placed the top-hat stolen from Sir William, was a final touch in the hideous. After placing his stolen hats on cab horses, lamp-posts, and stone lions, this madman seemed to have created a corpse so that he could have at last a fitting place to hang his hat.

The ride was endless. In the West End there had been a fairly light mist, but it thickened as they neared the river, and in Cannon Street it was almost dark, Sir William's chauffeur had to proceed with the utmost care. Hatless, his scarf wound crazily about his throat, strained forward with his hands gripping his knees, Sir William was jammed into the tonneau between Hadley and Dr Fell. Rampole sat on one of the small seats.

Sir William was breathing heavily.

‘We’d better talk,’ Dr Fell said in a gruff voice. ‘My dear sir, you will feel better... It’s murder now, Hadley. Do you still want me?’

‘More than ever,’ said the chief inspector.

Dr Fell puffed out his cheeks meditatively.

‘Then if you don’t mind, I should like’ to ask ... ?’

‘Eh?’ said Sir William, blankly. ‘Oh. No, no. Not at all. Carry on.’ He kept peering ahead into the mist.

The car bumped. Sir William turned and said: ‘I was very fond of the boy, you see’

‘Quite,’ said Dr Fell, gruffly. ‘What did they tell you over the phone, Hadley?’

‘Just that. That the boy was dead ; stabbed in some way. And that he wore a golf suit and Sir William’s top-hat. It was a relay call from the Yard, Ordinarily, I shouldn’t have

got the call at all. The matter would have been handled by the local police station, unless they asked the Yard for help. But in this case

‘Well?’

‘I had a feeling that this damned hat business wasn’t sheer sport. I left orders - and got smiled at behind my back for it, that if any further hat antics were discovered, they should be reported to the Yard by the local station, and sent through Sergeant Anders directly to me.’

‘How did the people at the Tower know it was Sir William’s hat?’

‘I can tell you that,’ snapped Sir William, rousing himself. ‘I’m tired of picking up the wrong hat when I go out in the evenings. All top-hats look alike in a row, and initials only confuse you. I have Bitton stamped in gold inside the crown of the formal ones, opera hats and silk ones ; yes, and bowlers too, for that matter.’ He was speaking rapidly and confusedly, and his mind was on other things. ‘Yes, and come to think of it, that was a new hat, too. I bought it when I bought the Homburg, because my other. opera hat got its spring broken...’

He paused, and brushed a hand over blank eyes.

'Ha,' he went on, dully, 'Odd. That's odd. You said my "stolen" hat, Hadley. Yes, the top-hat was stolen. That's, quite right; how did you know it was the stolen hat they found on Philip?'

Hadley was irritable. 'I don't know. They told me over the phone. But they said General Mason discovered the body, and so .. ;'

'Ah,' muttered Sir William, nodding and pinching the bridge of his nose. 'Yes. Mason was at the house on Sunday, and I daresay I told him. I !'

Dr Fell leaned forward, So,' he said, 'it was a new hat, Sir' William,?'

'Yes. I told you °

'An opera hat,' Dr Fell mused, 'which you were wearing for the first time.... When was it stolen?'

'Eh? Oh. Saturday night. When I was coming home from the theatre. We'd turned off Piccadilly into Berkeley Street.

It was a muggy night, rather warm, and all the windows of

the car were down. Just opposite Lansdowne Passage. Simpson slowed down to let some sort of blind man with a tray of pencils, or something, get across the street. Then somebody jumped out of the shadows near the entrance to the passage, thrust his arm into the rear of the car, twitched off my hat, and ran.'

'What did you do?'

'Nothing. I was too startled.'

'Did you chase the man?'

'And look a fool? Good God! No.'

'So naturally; said Dr Fell, 'you didn't report it. Did you catch a glimpse of the man?'

'No. It was too sudden, I tell you. Flick, and it was gone. Ha. Damn him. And now.... You see,' Sir William muttered, hesitantly, turning his head from, side to side 'you see ... Never mind the hat; I'm thinking about Philip. I never treated him as I should, I was as fond of him as a son. But I always acted the Dutch uncle. Kept him on a starvation allowance, always threatened to cut him off, and always told him how worthless he was. I don't know why I did it, but every

time I saw that boy I wanted to preach. He had no idea of the value of money'

The limousine slid among red houses, and street lamps, made pale gleams through its windows in a canopy of mist. Emerging from Mark Lane, it swerved round the Monument and descended Tower Hill.

Rampole could see nothing more than a few feet ahead. Lamps winked in smoky twilight, and the immensity which should have been the river was full of short, sharp whistle blasts answered by deeper hootings from a distance.

When the limousine passed through the gate in the rails surrounding the whole enclosure, Rampole tried to rub the blur from the window to peer out. Vaguely he saw a dry moat paved in white concrete, with a forlorn hockey-net near the middle. The drive swung to the left, past a frame building he remembered as the ticket-office and refreshment room, and under an arch flanked by low, squat round towers. Just under this, arch they were brought up short. A sentry, in the high black shako and grey uniform of the Spur Guard, moved out smartly and crossed his rifle on his, breast. The limousine slithered to a halt and Hadley sprang out.

In the dim, ghostly half-light another figure emerged at the sentry's side. It was one of the Yeoman Warders, buttoned up in a short blue cloak and wearing the red-and-blue Beefeater hat. He said:

'Chief Inspector Hadley? ...Thank you. If you'll follow me, sir ...?'

Hadley asked, shortly: 'Who is in charge?'

'The chief warder, sir, under the orders of the deputy governor. These gentlemen ...?'

'My associates. This is Sir William Bitton. What has been done?'

'The chief warder will explain, sir. The young gentleman's body was discovered by. General Mason.' 'Where?'

'I believe it was on the steps leading down to Traitors' Gate, sir. You know, of course, that the warders are sworn in as special constables. General Mason suggested that, as you were a friend of the young gentleman's uncle, we communicate directly with you instead of with the district police station.'

'Precautions?'

'An order has been issued that no one is to enter or leave the Tower until permission has been given.'

'Good! You had better leave instructions to admit the police surgeon and his associates when they arrive.'

'Yes, sir.' He spoke briefly to the sentry, and led them under the arch of the Tower.

A stone bridge led across the moat from this (called the Middle Tower) to another and larger tower, with circular bastions, whose arch formed the entrance to the outer walls.

Grey-black, picked out with whitish stones, these heavy defences ran left and right; but the damp mist was so thick that the entrance was entirely invisible.

Just under the arch of this next tower, another figure appeared with the same eerie suddenness as the others: a thick, rather short man with a straight back, his hands thrust into the pockets of a dripping waterproof. A soft hat was drawn down on his brows. He came forward, peering, as he heard their muffled footfalls on the road.

He said: 'Good God, Bitton! How did you get here?' Then he hurried up to grasp Sir William's hand.

'Never mind,' Sir William answered, stolidly. 'Thanks, Mason. Where have you got him?'

The other man looked into his face. He wore a gingery moustache and imperial, drooping with the damp there were furrows in his dull-coloured face and lines round his hard, bright unwinking eyes.

'Good man!' he said releasing his hand. 'This is?'

'Chief Inspector Hadley. Dr Fell. Mr Rampole ... General Mason,' explained Sir William, jerking his head. 'Where is he, Mason? I want to see him.'

General Mason took his arm. 'You understand; of course, that we couldn't disturb the body until the police arrived. He's where we found him. That's correct, isn't it, Mr Hadley?'

'Quite correct, General. If you will show us the place ... ? Thank you. I'm afraid we shall have to leave him there, though, until the police surgeon examines him.'

‘For God’s’ sake, Mason,’ Sir. William said, in a low voice, ‘how was he killed?’

General Mason drew a hand hard over his moustache and imperial. It was his only sign of nervousness. He said:

‘It appears to be a crossbow bolt, from what I can judge. There’s about four inches projecting from his chest, and the point barely came out the other.... Excuse me. A crossbow bolt. We have some in the armoury. Straight through the heart. Instantaneous death, Bitton. No pain whatever.’

‘You mean,’ said the chief inspector, ‘he was shot ... ’

‘Or stabbed with it like a dagger. More likely the latter. Come and look at him, Mr Hadley and then take charge of my court he nodded towards the Tower behind him ‘in there. I’m using the Warders’ Hall as a third degree room.’

‘What about visitors? They tell me you’ve given orders nobody is to leave.’

‘Yes. Fortunately, it’s a bad day and there aren’t many visitors. Also, fortunately, the fog is very thick down in the well around the steps of Traitors’ Gate; I don’t think a passer-by would notice him there. So far as I’m aware, nobody knows about it yet. When the visitors try to leave, they are stopped at the gate and told that an accident has happened; we’re trying to make them comfortable until you can talk to them.’

Ahead of them the hard road ran arrow-straight. Towards the left, a little distance beyond the long arch beneath which they stood, Rampole could see the murky outlines of another round tower. Joining it, a high wall ran parallel with the road. And Rampole remembered now. This left-hand wall was the defence of the inner fortress; roughly, a square within a square. On their right ran the outer wall, giving on the wharf. Thus was formed a lane some twenty-five or thirty feet broad, which stretched the whole length of the enclosure on the riverside. For perhaps a hundred yards along this road General Mason led them; then he stopped and pointed towards the right.

‘St Thomas’s Tower,’ he said. ‘And that’s the Traitors’ Gate under it.’

Traitors’ Gate was a long, flattened arch of stone, like the hood of an unholy fireplace in the thick wall. From the level of the road, sixteen

broad stone steps led down to the floor of a large paved area, which had once been the bed of the Thames. For originally this had been the gateway to the Tower by water; the river had flowed in at a level with the topmost steps, and barges had moved under the arch to their mooring. There were the ancient barriers, closed as of old: two heavy gates of oaken timbers and vertical iron bars, with an oaken lattice stretching above them to fill in the arch. Thames-wharf had been built up beyond, and the vast area below was now dry.

General Mason took an electric torch from his pocket, snapped it on, and directed the beam towards the ground. A warder had been standing motionless near the fence; and the General gestured with his light.

'Stand at the gate of the Bloody Tower,' he said, 'and don't let anybody come near. ... Now, gentlemen. I don't think we need to climb this fence. I've been down once before.'

Just before the beam of his flashlight moved down the steps, Rampole felt almost a physical nausea. Then he saw it. .

The thing lay with its head near the foot of the stairs, on its right side, and sprawled as though it had rolled down the entire flight of steps. Philip Driscoll wore a suit of heavy tweed, with plus fours, golf stockings, and thick shoes. As General Mason's light moved along the body, they saw the dull gleam of several inches of steel projecting from the left breast. Apparently the wound had not bled much.

The face was flung up towards them, just as the chest was slightly arched to show the bolt in the heart. White and waxy, the face was, with eyelids nearly closed; it had a stupid, sponged expression which would not have been terrifying at all but for the hat.

That opera hat had not been crushed in the fall. It was much too large for Philip Driscoll; whether it had been jammed on or merely dropped on his head, it came down nearly to his eyes, and flattened out his ears grotesquely.

General Mason switched off the light.

'You see?' he said out of the dimness. 'If that hat hadn't looked so weird, I shouldn't have taken it off at all, and seen your name inside it... Mr Hadley, do you want to make an examination now, or shall you wait for the police surgeon?'

'Give me your torch, please,' the chief-inspector requested. He

snapped on the light again and swung it round. 'How did you happen to find him, General?'

'There's more of a story connected with that,' the deputy governor replied, 'than I can tell you: The prelude to it you can hear from the people who saw him here when he arrived, earlier in the afternoon.'

When was that?'

'The time he arrived? Somewhere about twenty minutes past one, I believe; I wasn't here.... Dalrye, my secretary, drove me from the middle of town in my car, and we got here at precisely, two-thirty. We drove along Water Lane ... this road .. and Dalrye let me out at the gate of the Bloody Tower, directly opposite us.'

They peered into the gloom. The gate of the Bloody Tower was in the inner ballium wall, facing them across the road. They could see the teeth of the raised portcullis over it, and beyond, a gravelled road which led up to higher ground.

'My own quarters are in the King's House, inside that wall. I was just inside the gate, and Dalrye was driving off down Water Lane to put the car away, when I remembered that I had to speak to Sir Leonard Haldyne.'

Sir Leonard Haldyne?'

'The Keeper of the Jewel House. He lives on the other side of St Thomas's Tower. Turn on your light, please; now move it over to the right, just at the side of Traitors' Gate arch... There, The misty beam showed a heavy iron-bound door sunk in the thick wall. 'That leads to a staircase going up to the oratory, and Sir Leonard's quarters are on the other side.'

'By this time, in addition to the fog, it was raining. I came across Water Lane, and took hold of the railing here in front of the steps to guide me over to the door. What made me look down I don't know. Anyhow, I did glance down. I couldn't see anything clearly, but by what I did see I knew something was wrong. I climbed over the railing, went down cautiously, and struck a match. I found him.'

'What did you do then?'

It was obviously murder,' the general continued, without seeming to notice the question. 'A man who stabs himself can't drive a steel bolt through his own chest so far that the point comes out under his

shoulder-blade; certainly not such a small and weak person as young Driscoll. And he had clearly been dead for some time ... the body was growing cold.

‘Young Dalrye was coming back from the garage then, and I hailed him. I didn't tell him who the dead man was. He's engaged to Sheila Bitton, and well, you shall hear. But I told him to send one of the warders for Dr Benedict.

‘Who is that?’

‘The chief of staff in charge of the army hospital here. I told Dalrye to go to the White Tower and find Mr Radburn, the chief warden. He generally finishes his afternoon round at the White Tower at two-thirty. I also told him to leave instructions that nobody was to leave the Tower by any gate. I knew it was a useless precaution, because Driscoll had been dead some time and the murderer had every opportunity for a getaway; but it was the only thing to do.’

‘Just a moment,’ interposed Hadley. ‘How many gates are there through the outer walls?’

‘Three, not counting the Queen's Gate, nobody could get through there. There's the main gate, under the Middle Tower, through which you came. And two more giving on the wharf. They are both in this lane, by the way, some distance farther down.’

‘Sentries?’

‘Naturally. A Spur Guard at every gate, and a warden also. But if you're looking for a description of somebody who went out, I'm afraid it's useless. Thousands of visitors use those gates every day. Some of the warders have a habit of amusing themselves by cataloguing the people who go in and out, but it's been foggy all day and raining part of the time. Unless the murderer is some sort of freak, he had a thousand-to-one chance of having escaped unnoticed.’

‘Damn!’ said Hadley, under his breath. ‘Go on, General.’

‘That's about all. Dr Benedict - he's on his rounds now - confirmed my own diagnosis. He said that Driscoll had been dead at least three-quarters of an hour when I found him, and probably longer?’

General Mason hesitated.

‘There's a strange, an incredible story concerned’ with Driscoll's

activities here this afternoon. Either the boy went mad, or. .. another sharp gesture. 'I suggest that you look at him, Mr Hadley; then we can talk more comfortably in the Warders' Hall.'

Hadley nodded. He turned to Dr Fell. 'Can you manage the fence?'

Dr Fell's big bulk had been towering silently in the background, hunched into his cloak like a bandit. Several times General Mason had looked at him sharply. He was obviously wondering about this stout man with the shovel hat and the wheezy walk; wondering who he was and why he was there.

'No,' said the doctor. 'I'm not so spry as all that. But I don't think it's necessary. Carry on; I'll watch from here.'

The chief inspector drew on his gloves and climbed the barrier. A luminous circle from his flashlight preceded him down the steps.

First he carefully noted the position of the body, and made some sketches and markings in a notebook, with the torch propped under one arm. He flexed the muscles, rolled the body slightly over, and felt at the base of the skull. Most meticulously he examined the pavement of the area; then he returned to the few inches of steel projecting from the chest. It had been polished steel, rounded and thin, and it was not notched at the end as in the case of an arrow.

Finally Hadley removed the hat. The wet face of the small, dandyish youth was turned full up at them, pitiful and witless. Hadley did not even look at it. But he examined the hat carefully, and brought it up with him as he slowly mounted the stairs.

'Over the fence again, Hadley was silent for a long time. He stood motionless, his light off, slapping the torch with slow beats against his palm. Rampole could not see him well, but he knew that his eyes were roving about the lane. Finally he spoke.

'There's one thing your surgeon overlooked, General. There's a contusion at the base of the skull. It could have come either from a blow over the head, or - which is more likely - he got it by being tumbled down those stairs after the murderer stabbed him.'

The chief inspector peered about him slowly.

'Suppose he were standing at this rail, or near it, when the murderer struck. The rail is more than waist high, and Driscoll is quite small. It's unlikely that even such a terrific blow with that weapon would have

knocked him over the rail. Undoubtedly the murderer pitched him over to put him out of sight.

‘Still, we mustn’t overlook the possibility that the bolt might have been fired instead of being used as a dagger. That’s improbable; it’s almost insane, on the face of it. If a crossbow is what I think it is, then it’s highly unlikely that the murderer went wandering about the Tower of London carrying any such complicated apparatus.

‘A knife, or the blow of a blackjack in the fog, would have done just as well. And because of the fog - as you say,

General - it’s impossible that a marksman could have seen his target very far: certainly not to put a bolt so cleanly through the heart. Finally, there’s the hat.’ He took it from under his arm. ‘For whatever purpose, the murderer wanted to set his hat on the dead man’s head. I think I may take it for granted that Mr Driscoll wasn’t wearing it when he came to the Tower?’

‘Naturally not. The Spur Guard and the warder at, the Middle Tower, who saw him come in, said he was wearing a cloth cap?

‘Which isn’t here now,’ the chief inspector said, thoughtfully.. ‘But tell me, General. You said that so many people are always passing through here. - how did they happen to notice Driscoll?’

‘Because they knew him. At least, that warder had a nodding acquaintance with him; the guard, of course, is always changing. He’s quite a frequent visitor. Dalrye has got him out of so many scrapes in the past that Driscoll came to count on him that was why, he was here to-day!’ I see. Now, before we go into this matter of the weapon, there’s something, I want to know.... To begin with, we must admit this: whether he was shot or stabbed, he was killed very close to these steps. The murderer couldn’t walk about here, with all the warders present, carrying a dead body; these steps were made to order for concealment, and they were used. So let’s assume the most improbable course. Let’s assume (a) that he was shot with a crossbow; (b) that the force of the shot --and it was a very powerful one knocked him over this rail, or that the murderer later pushed him over and; (c) that subsequently the killer decorated him with Sir William’s hat. You see? Then from where could that bolt have been fired?’

General Mason massaged his imperial. They were peering at the wall across the way, at the gate of the Bloody Tower just opposite, and the bulk of a higher round tower just beside it.

‘Well,’ said the general, ‘it could have been fired from anywhere. From this lane, east or west, on either side of Traitors’ Gate. From under the gate of the Bloody Tower; that’s the most likely direction - a straight line. But it’s tommyrot. You can’t go marching about here with a crossbow, as though it were a rifle. It couldn’t be done.’

Hadley nodded placidly.

‘I know it couldn’t: But, as you say, that’s the most likely direction. So what about windows, or the top of a wall? Where could you stand and shoot a bolt from some such place? I shouldn’t have asked, but I can’t see anything beyond outlines in this fog.’

The general stared at him. Then he nodded curtly. There was a hard, jealous, angry parade-ground ring in his voice when he spoke; it made Rampole jump.

‘I see. If you’re suggesting, Mr Hadley, that any member of this garrison...’

‘I didn’t say that, my dear sir,’ Hadley answered, mildly. ‘I asked you a perfectly ordinary question.’

The general jammed his hands deeper, in the pockets of his waterproof. After a moment he turned sharply and pointed to the opposite wall.

‘Up there on your left,’ he said, ‘in that block of buildings jutting up above the wall proper, you may, be able to make out some windows. They are the windows of the King’s house. It is occupied by some of the Yeomen Warders and their families and by myself,’ I might add.... Then the ramparts of the wall overlooking us run straight along to the Bloody Tower. That space is called Raleigh’s Walk, and only a rather tall man can see over the rampart at all... . Raleigh’s Walk joins the Bloody Tower, in which there are some windows looking down at us, Next to the Bloody Tower, on the right, and joined to it, you see that large round tower? That’s the Wakefield Tower, where the Crown jewels are kept. You will find some windows there. You will also - not unnaturally find two warders on guard. Does that answer your question, sir?’

‘Thanks,’ said the chief inspector; ‘I’ll look into it when the mist clears a bit. If you’re ready, gentlemen, I think we can return to the Warders’ Hall.’

GENTLY General Mason touched Sir William's arm as they turned away. The latter had not spoken for a long time; he had remained holding to the rail and staring into the dimness of the area; and he did not speak now. He walked quietly at the general's side as they returned.

Still holding the hat under his arm, and propping flashlight against notebook, Hadley made several notations. His heavy, quiet face, with the expressionless dark eyes, was bent close over it in the torch-gleam.

He nodded, and shut the book.

'To continue, General. About that crossbow bolt. Does it belong here?'

'I have been wondering how long you would take to get to that,' the other answered, sharply. 'I don't know. I am inquiring. There is a collection of crossbows and a few bolts here; it is in a glass case in the armoury on the second floor of the White Tower. But I am perfectly certain nothing has been stolen from there.... However, we have a workshop in the Brick Tower, on the other side of the parade-ground, which we use for cleaning and repairing the armour and weapons on display. I've sent for the warder in charge. He will be able to tell you.'

'But could one of your display crossbows have been used?' 'Oh yes. They are kept in as careful repair as though we meant to use them as weapons ourselves.'

Hadley fell to whistling between his teeth. Then he turned to Dr Fell.

'For a person who enjoys talking as much as you do, Doctor,' he said, 'you have been incredibly silent. Have you any ideas?'

A long sniff rumbled in the doctor's nose. 'Yes,' he returned, 'yes, I have. But they don't concern windows or crossbows. They concern hats. Let me have that topper, will you?'

Hadley handed it over without a word.

'This,' General Mason explained, as they turned to the left at the Byward Tower, 'is the smaller Warders' Hall; we have our enforced guests in the other.' He pushed open a door under the arch, and motioned to them to pass.

It was not until Rampole entered the warmth of the room that he

realized how chilled and stiff he was. A large coal fire crackled under a hooded fireplace. The room was circular and comfortable, with a groined roof from which hung a cluster of electric lights, and cross-slits of windows high up in the wall. Behind a large flat desk, his hands folded upon it, sat a straight-backed elderly man, regarding them from under tufted white eyebrows. He wore the costume of the Yeomen Warders, but his was much more elaborate than those Rampole had seen. Besides him a tall, thin young man with a stoop was making notes on a slip of paper.

‘Sit down, gentlemen,’ said General Mason. ‘This is Mr Radburn, the chief warder ; and Mr Dalrye, my secretary.’

He waved his guests to chairs after he had performed the introductions, and produced a cigar-case. ‘What have you got now?’

The chief warder shook his head. He pushed out the chair in which he had been sitting for General Mason.

‘Not much, I’m afraid, sir. I’ve just questioned the guards from the White Tower, and the head workman from the repair shop. Mr Dalrye has the notes in shorthand.’

The young man shuffled some papers and blinked at General Mason. He had a long, rather doleful face, but a humorous mouth. His good-humoured, rather near-sighted grey eyes were bitter; he fumbled with a pair of pince-nez on a chain, then stared down at his papers.

‘Good afternoon, sir,’ he, said to Sir William. ‘They told me you were here. I ... - I can’t say anything, can I? You know how I feel.’

Then, still staring at his papers, he changed the subject with a rush. ‘I have the notes here, sir,’ he told General Mason. ‘Nothing has , been stolen from the armoury, of course. And the head workman at the shop, as well as both warders from the second floor of the White Tower, are willing to swear that crossbow bolt is not in the collection and never has been in any collection here!’

‘Why? You can’t possibly identify a thing like that, can you?’

‘John Brownlow got rather technical about it. And he’s by way of being an authority, sir. It’s here. He says’ - Dalrye adjusted his pince-nez and blinked ‘he says it’s a much earlier type of bolt than any we have here. That is, judging from what he can see of it ... in the body. Late fourteenth-century pattern. Ah, here we are. “The later ones are much shorter and thicker, and with a broader barb at the head. That

one's so thin it wouldn't fit smoothly in the groove of any crossbow in the lot."

General Mason turned to Hadley, who was carefully removing his overcoat. 'You're in charge now. So ask any questions you like. Give that chair to the chief inspector...; . But I think that proves it wasn't fired, unless you believe the murderer brought his own bow.' Then it couldn't have been shot from one of the crossbows here, Dalrye?'

Brownlow says it could have been, but that there would be a hundred-to-one chance of the bolt going wild.'

Mason nodded, and regarded the chief inspector with tight-lipped satisfaction. Rampole saw him for the first time in full light. He had removed his soggy hat and waterproof, and flung them on a bench; evidently there was about him none of that fussiness which is associated with the brass hat. Now he stood warming his hands at the fire, and peering round his shoulder at Hadley.

'Well?' he demanded. 'What's the first step' now?'

Dalrye put down his papers on the table,

'I think you'd better know,' he said, speaking between Mason and Sir William. 'There are two people here among the visitors who are certain to have an interest in this. They're over with the others in the Warders' Hall, I wish you'd give me instructions, sir. Mrs Bitton has been raising the devil ever since...'

'Who?' demanded Sir William. He had been staring at the fire, and he lifted his head suddenly.

'Mrs Lester Bitton. As I say, she's been - '

Sir William ruffled his white pompadour and looked blankly at Mason. 'My sister-in-law... What on earth would she be doing here?'

Hadley had sat, down at his desk, and was arranging note-book, pencil, and flashlight in a line with the utmost precision. He glanced up with mild interest.

'Ah,' he said, 'I'm glad to hear it. It centres our efforts, so to speak. But don't trouble her for the moment, Mr Dalrye; we can see her presently.' He folded his hands and contemplated Sir William, a wrinkle between his brows. 'Why does it surprise you that Mrs Lester Bitton should be here?'

‘Why, you know...’ Sir William began in some perplexity, and broke off. ‘No. As a matter of fact, you don’t know her, do you? Well she’s of the sporting type; you’ll see. I say, did you tell her about ... about Philip, Bob?’ He spoke hesitantly.

‘I had to,’ Dalrye answered, grimly.

Hadley had picked up his pencil, and seemed intent on boring a hole in the desk top with its point.

‘And the second person among the visitors, Mr’ Dalrye?’ he asked.

The other frowned. ‘It’s a Mr Arbor, Inspector. Julius Arbor. He’s rather famous as a book-collector, and I believe he’s stopping at Sir William’s house.’

Sir William raised his head. His eyes grew sharp again, for the first time since he had heard: the news of the murder.

He said: ‘Interesting. ‘Damned interesting.’ And he walked over with a springy step to sit down in a chair near the desk.

‘That’s better,’ approved the chief inspector, laying down his pencil. ‘But for the moment we shan’t trouble Mr Arbor, either. I should like to get the complete story of Mr Driscoll’s movements to-day. You said something, General, about a rather wild tale connected with it.’

General Mason turned from the fire.

‘Mr Radburn,’ he said to the chief warder, ‘will you send to the King’s House for Parker? Parker,’ he explained, as the other left the room, ‘is my orderly and general handyman. Meantime, Dalrye, you might tell the chief inspector about the wild-goose chase.’

Dalrye nodded. He looked suddenly older.

‘You see, Inspector,’ he said, ‘I didn’t know what it meant then, and I don’t know now. Except that it was a frame-up of some sort against Phil.’

His long legs were shaking a trifle as he lowered himself into a chair.

‘Take your time, Mr Dalrye,’ said the chief inspector. ‘Sir William - excuse me - has told us you are his daughter’s fiance. So I presume you knew young Driscoll well?’

'Very well. I thought a hell of a lot of Phil,' Dalrye answered quietly. He blinked as the smoke got into one eye. 'And naturally this business isn't pleasant. Well - you see, he had the idea that I was one of these intensely, practical people who can find a way out of any difficulty. He was always getting into scrapes, and always coming to me to help him out of them.'

'Difficulties?' repeated the chief inspector. He was sitting back in his chair, his eyes half closed, but he was looking at Sir William. 'What sort of difficulties?'

Dalrye hesitated. 'Financial, as a rule. Nothing important. He'd run up bills, and things like that ...'

'Women?' asked Hadley, suddenly. "

'Oh Lord! don't we all?' demanded the other, uncomfortably. 'I mean to say.. ' He flushed. 'Sorry. But nothing important there, either; I know that. He was always ringing me up in the middle of the night to say he'd met some girl at a dance who was the-absolute One and Only. He would rave. It lasted about a month, generally.'

'But nothing serious? Excuse me, Mr Dalrye,' said the chief inspector, as the other waved his hand, 'but I am looking for a motive for murder, you know. I have to ask such questions. So there was nothing serious?'

'No.'

'Please go on.'

'Well, Phil telephoned here early this morning, and Parker answered the telephone in the general's study. I wasn't up as a matter of fact. He began talking rather incoherently, Parker says, and said they were to tell me he would be down here at the Tower at one o'clock sharp; that he was in bad trouble and needed help. In the middle of it I heard my name mentioned, and came out and talked to him myself.'

'I thought it was probably nothing at all, but to humour him I said I should be here. Though, I told Jim, I had to go out early in the afternoon.'

'You see, if it hadn't been for that. As it happened, General Mason had asked me to take the touring-car up to a garage in Holborn and have the horn repaired. It's an, electric horn, and it got so that if you pressed it couldn't stop the thing's blowing.'

Hadley frowned. 'A garage in Holborn? That's rather unnecessarily out of the way, isn't it?'

Again a dull anger at the back of Mason's eyes. He was standing with his back to the fireplace, legs wide apart; he spoke curtly.

'Quite right, sir. You see it in a moment. But it happens to be run by an old army man; sergeant, by the way, who did me rather a good turn once.'

'Ah,' said Hadley. 'Well, Mr Dalrye?'

Rampole, leaning against a row of bookshelves with an unlighted cigarette in his fingers, tried again to imagine that all this was real; that he was really being drawn again into the dodges and terrors of a murder case. Undoubtedly it was true. But there was a difference between this affair and the murder of Martin Starberth. He was not, now, vitally concerned in its outcome. Through chance and, courtesy he was allowed to be present merely as a witness, detached and unprejudiced, of the lighted playbox where lay a corpse in an opera hat.

It was as bright as a play in the ancient room. There behind the desk sat the patient, watchful chief inspector, with his steel-wire hair and his clipped moustache, indolently folding his hands. On one side of him sat Sir William, his shrewdness glittering again behind impassive eyes; and on the other was the thin, wry-faced Robert Dalrye. Still bristling, General Mason stood with his back to the fire. And in the largest chair over against the fireplace, Dr Fell bad spread himself out and, he was contemplating with an owlish and naive gaze the opera hat in his hands.

Rampole became aware that Dalrye was speaking, and jerked his thoughts back.

'so I didn't think much more about it. That was all, until somewhere about one o'clock, the time Phil said he would be here. The phone rang again, and Parker answered it. It was Phil, asking for me. At least,' said Dalrye, squashing out his cigarette suddenly, 'it sounded like Phil. I was in the record-room at the time, working on the notes for the general's book, and Parker transferred the call. Phil was more chaotic than he had been in the morning. He said that, for a reason he couldn't explain over the phone,' he couldn't come to the Tower, but that I had got to come to his flat and see him. He used his old phrase - I'd heard it dozens of times before - that it was a matter of life or

death.'

'I was annoyed. I said I had work to do, and I damned well wouldn't do it, and that if he, wanted to see me he could come down here. Then he swore it really was a matter of life or death. And he said I had to come to Town, anyway; his flat was in Bloomsbury, and I had, to take the car to a garage which wasn't very far away; it wouldn't be out of my way if I dropped in. That was perfectly true. So I agreed.

Dalrye shifted in his chair. 'I'll admit - well, it did sound more convincing than the other times. I thought he might really have got himself into a genuine mess.'

'Had you any definite reason to believe this?'

'N-no. Yes. Well, make of it what you like.' Dalrye's gaze strayed across to the corner, where Dr Fell was still examining the top-hat with absorbed interest. Dalrye shifted uneasily. 'You see, Phil had been in rather high spirits recently. That was why I was so surprised at this change of front. He had been making a play with his stories on this hat-thief thing ... you know?'

'We have good reason, to know,' the inspector said. His look had suddenly become one of 'veiled' interest. 'Go on, please!'

'It was the sort of story he could do admirably.' He'd been freelancing, and he hoped the editor might give him a permanent column. So, as I say, I, was astonished when I heard him say what he did. And I remember, I said, "What's the row, anyway? I thought you were following the hat-thief, " And he said, "That's just it," in a sort of queer voice. "I've **followed it**

too, far. I've stirred up something, and it's got me."

The chief inspector leaned forward.

'Yes?' he prompted. 'You gathered that Driscoll, thought he was in danger from this hat-thief?'

'Something like that. Naturally, I joked about it. I remember asking, "What's the matter; are you afraid he'll steal your hat?" And he said, "It's not my hat I'm worried about. It's my head."

There was a silence. Then Hadley spoke casually:

'So you left the Tower. to go to his place. What then?'

‘Now comes the odd part of it. I drove up to the garage; it’s in Dane Street, High Holborn. The mechanic was busy on a job at the moment. He said he could fix the horn in a few minutes, but I should have to wait until he finished with the car he was working on. So I decided to walk to the flat, and pick up the car later. There was no hurry.’

Hadley reached for his notebook. ‘The address of the flat?’
‘Tavistock Chambers, 34 Tavistock Square, WC. It’s number two, on the ground floor.... Well, when I got there I rang at his door for a long time, and nobody answered.’ So I went in.’

‘The door was open?’

‘No. But I have a key. You see, the gates of the Tower of London are closed at ten o’clock sharp every night, and the King himself would have a time getting in after that. So, when I went to a theatre or a dance or something of the sort, I had to have a place to stay the night, and I usually stopped on the couch in Phil’s sitting-room.... Where was I? Oh yes. Well, I sat down to wait for him.’

Dalrye drew a long breath. He put the palm of his hand suddenly down on the table.

‘About fifteen minutes or so after I had left the Tower, Phil Driscoll appeared at the general’s quarters here and asked for me. Parker naturally said I had gone out in response to his phone message. Then, Parker says, Phil got as pale as death; he began to rave and call Parker mad. He had phoned that morning asking to see me at one o’clock. ... But he swore he had not changed the appointment. He swore he had never telephoned a second time at all.’

5 The Shadow by the Rail

HADLEY stiffened. He laid down the pencil quietly, but there were tight muscles down the line of his jaw.

‘Just so,’ he said quietly. ‘What then?’

‘I waited. It was getting foggier, and it had started to rain, and I got impatient. Then the phone in the flat rang, and I answered it.

‘It was Parker, telling me what I’ve just told you. He had called once before to get me, but I was at the garage and hadn’t arrived. Phil was waiting for me at the Tower, in a hell of a stew. Parker said he wasn’t drunk, and I thought somebody had gone mad. But there was nothing to do but return; I had to do that, anyway. I hurried over to get the

car, and when I was leaving the garage I met the General.... '

'You also,' inquired Hadley, glancing up, 'were in town, General?'

Mason was gloomily regarding his shoes. He looked up with a somewhat satiric expression.

'It would seem so. I had a luncheon engagement, and afterwards I went to the British Museum to pick up some books they had for me. As Dalrye says, it began to rain, so of course there weren't any taxis. Then I remembered the car would probably be at Stapleman's garage or, if it weren't, Stapleman would lend me a car to go back in. It's not far away from the Museum, so I started out. And I saw Dalrye in the car, and hailed him.... I've told you the rest of it. We got here at two-thirty, and found him.'

'Was it a very important luncheon engagement, General Mason?' asked Dr Fell suddenly.

The query was startling in its very naivete, and they all turned to look at him. His round and ruddy face was sunk into his collar, the great white plumed mop of hair straggling over one ear,

The General stared. 'I don't think I understand!'

'Was it by any chance,' pursued the doctor, 'a society of some sort, a board of directors' meeting, a gathering of ...'

'As a matter of fact,' said Mason, 'it was.' He seemed puzzled and his hard eyes grew brighter. 'The Antiquarians' Society. We meet for lunch on the first Monday of every month. I don't like the crowd. Gaa-a ! Sedentary fossils of the worst type.- I only stay in the organization because you get the benefit of their knowledge, on a doubtful question. Sir Leonard Haldyne - the Keeper of the jewels here drove me up in his car, at noon.'

I suppose your membership in the society is well known?'

'All my friends know of it, if that's what you mean. It seems' to amuse them at the Rag.'

Hadley nodded slowly, contemplating Dr Fell. 'I begin to see what you're driving at. . Tell me, General. You and Mr Dalrye were the only people at the Tower whom young Driscoll knew at all well?'

'Ye-es, I suppose so. I think he'd met Sir Leonard, and he had a

nodding acquaintance with a number of the warders, but . . . ' 'But you were the only ones he'd be apt to call on?'

'Probably.'

Dalrye's mouth opened a trifle, and he sat up. Then he sank back into his chair.

'I see, sir. You mean the murderer had made certain both General Mason and I were out?'

The doctor spoke in a testy voice, ringing the ferrule of his cane as he hammered it on the floor:

'Of course he did. If you had been there, he'd certainly have been with you. If the General had been here in your absence, he might have been with the General. And, the murderer wouldn't have any chance to lure him to a suitable spot in the fog and put an end to him.'

Dalrye looked troubled. 'All the same,' he said, 'I'm willin g to swear it was really Phil's voice on the phone that second time. My God! man - excuse me, sir!' He swallowed, and as Dr Fell only beamed blandly he went on with more assurance, 'What I mean is, I knew that voice as well as I knew anybody's. And if what you say is true, it couldn't have been Phil's voice at all..: Besides, how did this person, whoever it was, know that Phil had arranged to meet me down here at one o'clock? And why all the rigmarole about being "afraid of his head" ?'

'Those facts,' said Dr Fell composedly, 'may provide us with very admirable clues. Think them over. By the way, what sort of voice did Driscoll have?'

Dalrye hesitated. 'The only way to describe it is incoherent. He thought so fast that he ran miles ahead of what he was trying to say. And when he was excited his voice tended to grow high.'

Dr Fell, his head on one side and his eyes half closed, was nodding slowly. He peered up, as a knock sounded at the door, and the chief warder entered.

'The police surgeon is here, sir,' he said, 'and several other men from Scotland Yard. Are there any instructions?'

Hadley started to rise, and reconsidered.. 'No. Just tell them the usual routine, if you please ; they'll understand. I want about a dozen pictures of the body, from all angles. Is there any place the body can

conveniently be taken for examination ?'

'The Bloody Tower, Mr Radburn,' said General Mason. 'Use the Princes Room that's very suitable. Have you got Parker here?'

'Outside, sir; Have you any instructions about those visitors? They're getting impatient, and

'In a moment,' said Hadley. 'Would you mind sending Parker in?' As, the chief warder withdrew, he turned to Dalrye. 'You have those visitors' names?'

'Yes. And I rather overstepped my rights,' said Dalrye. He drew from his wallet a number of sheets of paper. 'I was very solemn about it. I instructed them to write down names, addresses, occupations, and references. Most of them were obvious tourists. I don't think there's any harm in them, and they didn't show any fight. Except Mrs Bitton, that is. And one other woman.'

He handed the bundle of sheets to Hadley. The chief inspector glanced up sharply. 'One other woman? Who was she?'

'I didn't notice what she wrote, but I remembered her name from the way she acted. Hard-faced party. You see, I had it all very official, to scare 'em into writing the truth. And this woman was wary. She said, "You're not a notary, are you, young man?" and I was so surprised that I looked at her. Then she said, "You've got no right to do this, young man. We're not under oath. My name is Larkin, and I'm a respectable widow, and that's all you need to know."

Hadley shuffled through the papers.

'Larkin,' he repeated. 'H'm. We must look into this. When the net goes out, we often get small fish we're not after at all.... Larkin, Larkin here it is. "Mrs Amanda Georgette Larkin." The "Mrs" in brackets; she wants that clearly understood. Stiff handwriting. Address - Hallo!'

He put down the sheets and frowned. 'Well, well ! The address is "Tavistock Chambers, 34 Tavistock Square." So she lives in the same building as young Driscoll, eh? This is getting to be quite a convention.'

Sir William had been rubbing his jaw uneasily. He said: 'Look here, Hadley, don't you think you'd better bring Mrs Bitton away from the crowd? - She's my sister-in-law, you know, and after all ...'

'Most unfortunate,' said Hadley, composedly. 'Where's that man Parker?'

Parker had been standing hatless and coatless in the fog just outside the crack of the door, waiting to be summoned. At Hadley's remark he knocked; came inside, and stood at attention.

He was a square, brownish man with a military cut. Like most corporals of his day, he ran largely to moustache ; nor did he in the least resemble a valet. The high white collar pinioned his head, as though he were having a daguerreotype taken.

'You are General Mason's orderly?' Hadley inquired. Parker looked pleased. 'Yussir.'

'Mr Dalrye has already told us of the two phone calls

from Mr Driscoll ... You answered the phone both times, I believe?'

'Yussir. On both occasions.'

'So you had some conversation with Mr Driscoll?'

'I did, sir. Our talks was not lengthy, but full of meat.' 'Could you swear it was Mr Driscoll's voice both times?' Parker frowned. 'Well, sir, when you say, "Could you swear it?" '- that's a long word,' he answered, judicially. 'To the best of my knowledge and discernment from previous occasions, sir, it were.'

'Very well. Now, Mr Dalrye left here in the car shortly before one o'clock. Do you remember at what time Mr Driscoll arrived?'

'One-fifteen, sir.'

'How are you so positive?'

'Excuse me, sir,' Parker said, stolidly. 'I can inform you of everything that happens at the time which it happens, exact, sir, by the movements at the barracks. Or by the bugles. One-fifteen it was.'

Hadley tapped his fingers slowly on the desk.

'Now, take your time, Parker. I want you to remember everything that happened after Mr Driscoll arrived. Try to remember conversations, if you can. ... First, what was his manner? Nervous? Upset?'

'Very nervous and upset, sir.' 'And how was he dressed?'

'Cloth cap, light-brown golf suit, worsted stockings, club tie, sir. No overcoat. He asked for Mr Dalrye. I said Mr Dalrye had gone to his rooms in response to his own message. He then demonstrated incredulity. He used strong language, at which I was forced to say, "Mr Driscoll, sir,"

I said, "I talked to you myself." I said, "When I answered the telephone you thought I was Mr Dalrye ; and you said all in a rush, 'Look here, you've got to help me out I can't come down now,' and - 'That's what you said'." Parker cleared his throat. 'I explained that to him, sir.'

'What did he say?'

'He said, "How long has Mr Dalrye been gone?" I told him about fifteen' minutes. And he said, "Was he in the car?" and I said "Yes," and he said - excuse me, sir,' "Oh, my God! that's not long enough to drive up there on a foggy day." But, anyway, he went to the telephone and rang up his own flat.' There was no, answer. He said to get him, a drink, which I did. And while I was getting it I noticed that he kept looking out of the window.... '

Hadley- opened his half-closed eyes. 'Window? What window?'

'The window of the little room where Mr Dalrye works, sir, in the east wing of the King's House.'

'What can you see from there?'

Parker, who had become so interested in his story that he forgot to be flowery, blinked and tried to right his thoughts. 'See, sir?'

'Yes! The' view. Can you see the Traitors' Gate, for instance ?'

"Oh. Yussir! I thought you was referring to ... well, sir, to something I saw, which I didn't think was important, but now I get to thinking. ..'

You saw something?'

'Yussir. That is,, it was after Mr Driscoll had left me, sir.' '

Hadley seemed to fight down a desire to probe hard. He had half-risen, but he sat back and said, evenly: 'Very well. Now go on with the

story, Parker, from the time you saw Mr Driscoll looking out of the window.'

'Very good, sir. He finished his drink, and had another neat. I asked, him why he didn't go back to his flat, if he wanted to see Mr Dalrye. And he said, "Don't be a fool; I don't want to take the chance of missing him again. We'll keep ringing my place every five minutes until I know where he is."

Parker recounted the conversation in a gruff, sing-song voice, and in such a monotone that Rampole could tell only with difficulty where he was quoting Driscoll and where he spoke himself. But he could not sit still, sir. He roamed about. Finally he said: "My God - I can't stand this; I'm going for a walk in the grounds.. So he went out." How long was he with you?'

'A matter of ten minutes, say, sir. No; it was less than that. ... Well, sir, I paid no more attention. I should not have seen anything, except ' Parker hesitated. He saw the veiled gleam in Hadley's eyes ; he saw Sir William bent forward, and Dalrye pausing with a match almost to his cigarette. And he seemed to realize he was a person of importance. He gave the hush its full value.

'except, sir,' he suddenly continued in a louder voice; 'for the match-in-ashuns of fate. I may remark, sir; that earlier in the day there had been a light mist. But nothing of what might be termed important. It was possible to see some distance and objects was distinct: But it was a-growing very misty. That was how I come to look out of the window. And that was when I saw Mr Driscoll.'

Hadley's fingers stopped tapping while he scrutinized the other.

'How did you know it was Mr Driscoll? You said the mist was thickening....'

'I didn't say I saw his face. Nobody could have recognized him that way: he was just an outline. But, sir, wait! There was his size. There was his plus-fours, which he always wore lower-down than other gentlemen. And when he went out he was a wearing his cap: with the top all pulled over to one side. Then I saw him walking back and forth in Water Lane.'

'But you can't swear it was actually he?'

'Yussir. I can. Becos, sir, he went to the rail in front of

Traitors' Gate and leaned on it. And whereupon he struck a match to light a cigarette. Just for a second I saw part of his face. Yussir, I'm positive. I know. I saw 'im just before the other person touched 'im on the arm.... '

'What?' demanded Hadley, with such suddenness that Parker took it for a slur on his veracity.

'Sir, so help me God' The other person that was standing over by the side of Traitors' Gate. And that came out and touched Mr Driscoll on the arm.'

'Did you see this other person, Parker?'

'No sir. It was too dark there; shadowed, sir. I shouldn't even have seen Mr Driscoll if I hadn't been watching him and saw 'im strike the match.'

'Could you tell whether this person was a man or a woman?'

'Er - no, sir. I turned away then. I was not endowed with the opportunity to see no further occurrences.'

'Quite. Do you know at what time this was?' 'It were shortly past one-thirty.'

Hadley, brooded, his head in his hands. After a time he looked across at General Mason.

'And the doctor here said, General, that when you discovered the body at two-thirty. Driscoll had been dead at least half an hour - probably three-quarters? Yes. Well, that's that. He was murdered within ten minutes or fifteen minutes after this other person touched his arm at the rail.

The police surgeon will be able to tell us exactly.'

He paused, and looked at Mason's orderly.

'Very well, Parker. That's all, and thank you. You've been most helpful.'

Parker clicked his heels and went out glowing.

The chief inspector drew a long breath. 'Well, gentlemen, there you are. The murderer had considerably over half an hour's time to clear out. And, as the general says, what between rain and fog the sentries

at the gates wouldn't have been able to see anything of a person who 'slipped' out. Now, we get down to work. Our first hope ... '

He picked up the sheets containing the names of the visitors.

'Sincee we have something to go on,' he continued, 'we can use our guests. We know the approximate time of the murder. Hallo!' he called towards the door, and a warder opened it. 'Will you go down to the Bloody Tower and send up the sergeant in charge of the police officers who have just arrived?'

'I hope it's Hamper,' he added to his companions. 'First, we'll put aside the slips made out by the three people we want to interview ourselves - Mrs Bitton, Mr Arbor, and, just as a precaution, the careful Mrs Larkin. Let's see, Larkin - -'

'Mrs Bitton didn't make out any, sir,' Dalrye told him.' 'She laughed at the idea.'

'Right, then. Here's the Arbor one. Let's see. I say, that's a beautiful handwriting; like the lettering on a calling card. Fastidious, this chap.' He examined the paper curiously. "Julius Arbor, 440 Park Avenue, New York City. No occupation

'Doesn't need one,' Sir William growled. 'He's got pots.'

"Arrived Southampton, March 4, S.S. Bremen. Duration of stay indefinite. Destination, Villa Seule, Nice, France." He adds, very curtly, "If further information is necessary, suggest communicating with my London solicitors, Messrs Hillton and Dane, Lincoln's Inn Fields." H'm.'

He smiled to himself, put the sheet aside, and glanced hastily at the others.

'If you've ever heard any of these other names, gentlemen, sing out ; otherwise I'll let the sergeant handle them.

'Mr and Mrs George G. Bebber, 291 Aylesborough Avenue, Pittsburgh, Pa., U.S.A. - Lucien Lefevre, 60 Avenue Foch, Paris. Mlle Clementine Lefevre, as above. - Miss Dorothea Delevan Mercenay, 23 Elm Avenue, Meadville, Ohio, U.S.A. Miss Mercenay adds M.A. to her name, underscored heavily. That's the lot. They sound harmless enough.'

'Sergeant Betts, sir,' said a voice at the door. A very serious-faced young man saluted nervously.

'Betts,' said Hadley. 'Betts.. oh yes. Did you get a picture of the dead man's face?'

'Yes, sir. They've set up the outfit in that Tower place, and the pictures are drying now.'

'Right.. Take a copy of that picture and show it to all the people listed here; the warder will show you where they are. Ask them if they saw him today; when and where. Be particular about anybody they may have seen in the vicinity of the Traitors' Gate at any time, or anybody acting suspiciously. Mr Dalrye, I should be obliged if you would go along and make shorthand notes of anything important'

Dalrye rose, reaching for pencil and notebook.

'I want particularly to know, Betts, where they were between one-thirty and one forty-five o'clock. That's vital. Mr Dalrye, will you kindly ask Mrs Lester Bitton to step in here?'

6

The Souvenir Crossbow Bolt

'Now, then,' Hadley pursued. Again with meticulous attention he straightened the pencil, the notebook, and the flashlight before him. 'The police surgeon will bring in the contents of Driscoll's pockets, and we can have a good look at the weapon. I'll leave it up to the chief warder to take charge of questioning the warders about whether they saw anything.'

'Now, Gentlemen. Before we see Mrs Bitton, suppose we try to clarify our ideas. Let's go around, the circle here, and see what we all have to say. Sir William, what strikes you about the case?'

'That's easy,' Sir William said, twisting the ends of his white scarf. 'You can't miss it. It's the absolute lack of motive. Nobody in the world had the slightest reason for killing Philip.'

'Yes. But you're forgetting one thing,' Hadley pointed out. 'We're dealing, in some fashion with a madman. It's useless to deny that this hat-thief is mixed up in it. Whether he, killed Philip Driscoll or not, he seems to have put that hat on his head. Now, from what Dalrye said, it's clear that Driscoll was on the hat-man's track pretty closely ..'

'But, good God, man! You can't seriously suggest that this fellow killed Philip because Philip found out who he was! That's absurd.'

'Quite. But worth looking into. Therefore, what's our obvious move?'

Sir William's hooded eyelids drooped. 'I see. Philip was turning in regular, copy to his newspaper. One of his articles appeared to-day, in the morning edition. That means he turned it in last night. And if he went to the office, he may have told his editor something ... ?'

'Precisely. That's our first line of inquiry. If by any wild chance his agitation to-day was caused by some sort of threat, it would probably have been sent to the office; or at least he might have mentioned it there. It's worth trying.!

'Rubbish,' said Dr Fell. I

'Indeed?' said the chief inspector, with heavy politeness. 'Would you mind telling us why?'

The doctor made a capacious gesture. 'Hadley, you know your own game, Heaven knows. But you don't know the newspaper business. I, for my sins, do. Did you ever hear the story of the cub reporter whose first assignment was to cover a big Pacifist meeting in the West End? Well, he came back with a doleful face. "Where's your story?" says thee news editor. "I couldn't get one," says the cub ; "there wasn't any meeting." "No meeting?" says the news editor. "Why not?" "Well," says' the cub, "the first speaker had no sooner got started than somebody threw a brick at him. And then Lord Dinwiddie fell through the bass drum, and a fight started all around the platform, and they began hitting each other over the head with the chairs, and when I saw the Black Maria at the door I knew there wouldn't be any more meeting, so I left."

Dr Fell shook his head sadly. 'That's the sort of picture you're drawing, Hadley. Man, don't you see that if Driscoll had found out anything, or particularly been threatened, it would have been NEWS ? News in capitals, "HAT FIEND THREATENS DAILY SOMETHING' MAN." Certainly he'd have mentioned it at the office. Rest assured you'd have seen it to-day on the first page.'

'He mightn't,' Hadley said, irritably, 'if he had been as nervous as he seems to have been.'

'Wait a bit. You're wrong there,' put in Sir William. 'Give the boy his due. Whatever he was, he wasn't a coward. His upsets never came because he feared any sort of violence.!

'But he said. ...'

'That isn't the point, you see,' Dr Fell said, patiently. 'To publish anything of the sort couldn't have done any harm. They might say they'd found a vital clue, or that there had been a threat. The first would only warn their victim. The second would have been more publicity, which the hat-fellow wanted in the-first place; look at the way he acts. It would have done no harm, and assuredly it would have helped young Driscoll's job.'

'Suppose he'd actually found out who the man was, though?'

'Why, the newspaper would have communicated with the police,' and Driscoll would have got the credit. Do you seriously think anybody would have been afraid, at the time, of a person who seemed to be a mere genial practical joker?

No, no. You're letting the hat on the corpse run away with your own sense of humour. I'm willing to agree with Sir William's statement the boy wasn't a coward but what was it he did fear? There's a tip. Think it over.'

'I have something to say to you in a moment,' the chief inspector told him. 'But, for the moment, let's continue. Have you any suggestions, General?'

General Mason had been smoking glumly. He took the cigar out of his mouth and shook his head.

'None whatever. Except that it's fairly obvious now he was stabbed and not shot with that bolt.'

'Mr Rampole?' Hadley saw that the American was ill at ease, and raised his eyebrows encouragingly. 'Any ideas?'

Three pairs of eyes were fixed on him, and he tried to be casual under the scrutiny. This might be the test as to whether he heard anything more of the case after today.

'There was something,' he said, feeling his voice a trifle unsteady. 'The crossbow bolt didn't come from the collection here, and one of the warders said its pattern was late fourteenth century. Now, it isn't probable, is it, that Driscoll was really killed with a steel bolt made in thirteen hundred and something?' He hesitated. 'I used to dabble a bit with arms and armour; one of the finest collections in the world is at the Metropolitan Museum in New York. In a bolt so old as that one,

the steel would be far gone in corrosion. Would it be possible to get that bright polish and temper on the one used to kill Driscoll? It looks new. If I remember correctly, you have no arms exhibits here previous to the fifteenth century. And even your early fifteenth-century helmets are worn to a sort of rusty shell.'

There was a silence. 'I begin to see,' nodded the chief inspector. 'You mean that the bolt is of recent manufacture. And if it is?'

'Well, sir, if it, is, who made it? Certainly there aren't many smiths turning out crossbow bolts of fourteenth-century pattern. It may be a curio of some kind, or there may be somebody who does it for amusement or for decorative purposes.'

Hadley made a note in his black book. -'It's a long shot,' he remarked, shaking his head, 'but undoubtedly there's something in it. Good work! Now we come to my usually garrulous colleague, Dr Fell. What are your comments on the testimony we've heard?'

Dr' Fell cocked his head on one side. He seemed to meditate.

'Why, I'm afraid I wasn't paying a great deal of attention to it. However, I want to ask one question.' 'That's gratifying. What is it?'

'This hat.' He picked up the topper. 'I suppose you noticed. When it was put on the boy's head, it slid down over his ears. Of course, he's very, small, Sir William, and you're tall. But you have rather a long narrow head. Wasn't it too large even for you?'

'Too ... ' The other looked bewildered. 'Why, no! No, it wasn't too large. Hold on, though. I remember now. When I was trying, on hats at the shop, I remember one I tried on, among others, was too large. But the one they sent me was quite all right: a good fit.'

'Well, would you mind putting this one on?'

For a moment Sir William seemed about to stretch out his hand, as General Mason took the hat from Dr Fell and passed it across. Then he sat rigid.

'You'll have to excuse me,' he said through his teeth. 'I - sorry, but I can't do it.'

'Well, well, it's of no consequence,' Dr Fell said, genially. He took back the hat, pressed it down so that it collapsed, and fanned his ruddy face with it. 'Not for the moment, anyhow. Who are your

hatters ?'

'Steele's, in Regent,' Street. Why?'

'Mrs Lester Bitton,' said a voice at the door. The warder on guard pushed it open.

Mrs Bitton was not backward. She came into the room with an assurance which betokened a free stride, and she radiated energy. Mrs Bitton was a slim woman in the late twenties, with a sturdy, well-shaped figure like a swimmer's. She had level, rather shining brown eyes, a straight nose, and a humorous but determined mouth. Her light-brown hair was caught under the tilt of a tight blue hat; beneath a broad fur collar the tight-fitting coat showed off her full breasts and rather voluptuous hips...: As she caught sight of Sir William she became less assured.

'Hallo!' she said. The voice was quick and self-determined. 'Bob didn't tell me you were here. I'm sorry you got here so soon.'

Sir William performed the introductions. Rampole set out a chair for her beside Hadley's desk.

'So you're Mr Hadley,' she observed, studying him with her bead slightly back. Then she looked at Sir William. 'I've heard Will speak of you.' She made a cool inspection of everybody in the room, finally craning round the better to see Dr Fell. 'And these are your inspectors or something. I'm afraid I kicked up rather a row across the way. But then I didn't know. Even when Bob told me ... told me it was Phil, I didn't believe him.'

Despite her assurance Rampole got a definite impression that she was nervous.

'You know the circumstances, Mrs Bitton?' Hadley asked impassively.

'What Bob was able to tell me. Poor Phil! I'd like to...'

She paused, seeming to meditate punishments for a murderer. 'Of course it was absurd asking me to fill out that silly paper. As though I had to explain:

'It was merely a matter of form. However, you under that all the people who were here near the time of the tragedy must be questioned!'

'Of course I understand that.' She looked at Hadley sharply. 'When was Phil killed?'

'Well come to that in a moment, Mrs Bitton. Let's get things in order, if you don't mind.... To begin with, I dare say this isn't the first time you've visited the Tower? Naturally, you're interested in the - er - historic treasures of the place?'

A rather humorous look crept into her face. 'That's- a gentleman's way of asking me my business!' Her eyes wandered to Sir William. 'I imagine Will has already told you about me. He thinks I haven't any interest in musty ruins and things like that.'

General Mason was stung. The word 'ruins' had shocked him. He took the cigar out of his mouth.

'Madam,' he interposed, warmly, 'if you will excuse my reminding you .. '

'Certainly,' she agreed, with a bright smile, and looked back at Hadley. 'However, that's not true. I do like them. I like to think about those people in armour, and the tournaments and things, and fights. But I was going to tell you why I was here. It wasn't the Tower exactly. It was the walk.'

'The walk?'

'I'm afraid, Mr Hadley,' she observed, critically, 'that you don't walk enough. Good for you. Keeps you fit. Lester is getting a paunch that's why I take him on walking tours as often as he'll let me. We just came back yesterday from a walking trip in the West Country. So to-day I decided to walk from Berkeley Square to the Tower of London.

'I couldn't persuade Lester to go along, so I came down 1, here alone. And then I thought, "So long as I'm here, I' might as well look at the place."

'I see. Do you' remember what time you arrived?'

'One o'clock or some time afterwards, I fancy. I had a sandwich in the refreshment-room up by the gate. That was where I bought the tickets for the towers; three of 'em. A white one, a pink one, and a green one.'

Hadley glanced at General Mason. The latter said:

‘For the White Tower, the Bloody Tower, and the Crown Jewels. There's an admission fee for those.’

‘M,-yes. Did you use these tickets, Mrs Bitton?’

For a moment, the movement of her full breast was quicker. Then her lip curled slightly.

‘I had a look at the Crown jewels,’ she replied, with no expression of candour. ‘They looked like glass to me. And I'll bet they're not real, either.’

General Mason's face had assumed a brickish hue, and a strangled noise issued from him.

‘May I ask why you didn't use the other tickets, Mrs Bitton ?’ Hadley asked quickly.

‘O Lord, how should I know? I changed my mind.’ She slid her body about in the chair, seeming to have lost interest. But her eyes looked strained. ‘I did wander about a bit in that inner courtyard up there. And I talked to one nice old Beefeater.’

General Mason broke in with cold courtesy:

‘Madam, may I,, request you not to use that word? The guards at the Tower are called Yeoman Warders, not Beefeaters. The term is applied.. ’

‘I’m sorry. Of course I didn’t know. You hear people talk, that’s all. I pointed to that place where the stone slab is, where it says they used to chop people’s heads off, you know, and I asked the Bee ... the man, “Is that where Queen Elizabeth was executed?” And he nearly fainted. He cleared his throat a couple of times, and said, “Madam...er ... Queen Elizabeth had not the honour to be. ... ah... I mean, Queen Elizabeth died in her bed.” And then reeled off a list of people who got their heads chopped off there; and I said, “What did she die of?” and he said,

“Who, ma’am?” and I said, “Queen Elizabeth” and he made a sort of funny noise.’

Hadley was not impressed. ‘Please keep to the subject, Mrs Bitton. When did you leave?’

‘My dear man, I don’t carry a watch. But I know that I came down from the parade-ground under the arch of that big place called the Bloody Tower. And I saw a group of people standing over by the rail around these steps, and there was a Beefeater who asked me if I would mind going on. So I suppose it was after you found ... Phil.’

‘Did you run into Mr Driscoll at any time?’

‘No. Naturally, I didn’t know he was there.’

Hadley absently, tapped his fingers on the desk for some time. He resumed suddenly: ‘Now, Mrs Bitton, according to your own statement you arrived here in the vicinity of one o’clock. The body was discovered at two-thirty, and of course you started to leave after that time, or you wouldn’t be here. So you spent all, that time looking at the Crown Jewels and wandering about the parade-ground in the fog? Is that correct?’

She laughed and regarded Hadley with some defiance. But she was not so cool as before.

‘I hope you don’t think I’m afraid of a bit of mist or rain? Good Lord! You surely don’t think I had anything to do with killing Phil, do you?’

‘It is my duty to ask these questions,’ Mrs Bitton. Since you carried no watch, I suppose you do not know whether you were anywhere near the Traitors’ Gate between half past one and a quarter to two?’

'The Traitors' Gate,' she repeated. 'Let's see. Which one is that?'

Hadley nodded towards her handbag. 'May I ask what you have there, under the strap on the other side of your bag? Folded over, I mean; a green pamphlet of some sort.'

'It's ... I say, I'd forgotten all about it ! It's a guide to the Tower of London. I bought it for twopence at the ticket-window.'

'Were you anywhere near the Traitors' Gate between half past one and a quarter to two?'

She took out a cigarette, lighted it with a sweep of the match, against the table, and regarded him with cold anger.

'Thanks for repeating the question,' she returned. 'It's most considerate. If by the Traitors' Gate you mean the one where Phil was found, as I assume you do, the answer is No. I was not near it, at any time except when I passed it going in and coming out.'

Hadley grinned. It was a placid, slow, homely grin, and it made his face almost genial. The woman's face, had hardened, and there was a strained look about her eyes; but she caught the grin, and suddenly laughed.

'All right. Touche. But I'm hanged if I let you pull my leg again, Mr Hadley. I thought you meant it.'

'We now come to the inevitable. Mrs Bitton, do you know anybody who would desire to take Mr Driscoll's life?'

'Nobody would want to kill him. It's absurd. Phil was wonderful. He was a precious lamb.'

General Mason shuddered, and even Hadley winced.

'Ah,' he said. 'He, may have been as you say, a ... never mind. When did you last see him?'

'H'm. Well, it's been some time. It was before Lester and I went to Cornwall. He only comes to the house on Sundays. And he wasn't there yesterday, now that I come to think of it.' She frowned. 'Yes. Will was so cut up over losing that manuscript, and turning the house upside down.. or did you know about that?'

'We know,' Hadley answered, grimly.

'Wait a bit. Wait. I'm wrong,' she corrected, putting her hand down on the desk. 'He did come in for, a short time rather late Sunday night, to pay his respects to us. He was on his way, to the newspaper, office to turn in his story, I remember: about the barrister's wig on the cab-horse. Don't you remember, Will?'

Sir William rubbed his forehead. 'I don't know. I didn't see him, but then I was occupied.'

Sheila told us about this new newspaper line of his chasing hats! For the first time Laura Bitton shuddered. 'And I told him what Sheila told me, about Will's hat being stolen the night before.'

'What did he say?'

'Well, he asked a lot of questions, about where it had been stolen, and when, and all about it; and then I remember he started to pace up and down the drawing-room, and he said he'd got a "lead", and went hurrying away before we could ask what he meant'

A knock at the door preceded the appearance of an oldish tired man carrying a bundle made out of a handkerchief. He saluted. I

'Sergeant Hamper, sir. I have the dead man's belongings here. And the police surgeon would like to speak to you.'

A mild-mannered, peering little man with a goatee doddered in at the door.

'Howdy!' he said, pushing his derby hat slightly back on his head with the hand containing his black satchel. In the other he held a straight length of steel. 'Here's your weapon, Hadley. Hur-umph. ... No, no fingerprints. I washed it'

He doddered over to the table, examined it as though he were looking for a suitable place, and put down the crossbow bolt. It was rounded, thin, and about eighteen inches long, with a barbed steel head.

'Funny-lookin' things they're usin' nowadays,' commented the doctor, rubbing his nose.

'It's a crossbow bolt from the late fourteenth century!'

'My eye,' said the doctor, 'and Betty Martin. Look what's engraved down it. "Souvenir de Carcassonne, 1932." The pirate French sell 'em

at little souvenir booths'

‘But, Doctor said Sir. William.

The other blinked at him. ‘My, name,’ he observed, with a sudden querulous suspicion - ‘my name, sir, is Watson. Doctor Watson. And if any alleged humorist... squeaked the doctor, flourishing his satchel - ‘if any alleged humorist makes the obvious remark, I’ll brain him. For thirty years on this force I’ve been hearin’ nothing else. And I’m tired of it. People hiss at me round corners. They ask me for needles and four-wheelers and Shag tobacco, and have I my revolver handy?’

Laura Bitton had paid no attention to this tirade. She had grown a trifle pale, and she was standing motionless, staring down at the crossbow bolt.

She said, in a voice she tried to keep matter-of-fact:

‘I know where this belongs, Mr Hadley.!

‘You’ve seen it before?’

‘It comes,’ said Mrs Bitton, in a careful voice, ‘from our house. Lester and I bought it when we were on a walking trip in southern France.’

7 Mrs Larkin’s Cuff

‘SIT down, everybody!’ Hadley said, sharply. ‘This place is turning into a madhouse. You’re certain of that, Mrs Bitton?’

She seemed to recover herself from an almost hypnotized stare at the bright steel

‘I .., I mean ... of course I can’t; say. Things like that are on sale at Carcassonne, and hundreds of people must buy them.’

‘Quite,’ Hadley agreed, dryly. ‘However, you bought one just like it. Where did you keep it?’

‘I honestly don’t know. I haven’t seen it for months. I remember when we returned from the trip I ran across it in the baggage and thought, “Now, why on earth did I buy that stupid thing?” My impression is that I chucked it away somewhere.’

Hadley turned the bolt over in his hand, weighing it. Then he felt the point and sides of the head,

‘Mrs Bitton, the point, and barb are as sharp as a knife. Was it like that when you bought it?’

‘Good Lord, no! It was very blunt. You couldn’t possibly have cut yourself with it.’

‘As a matter of fact,’ said the chief inspector, holding the head close, ‘I think it’s been filed and whetted. And there’s something else. Has anybody got a lens? ... Ah, thanks; Hamper.’ He took the small magnifying glass which the sergeant passed over, and tilted up the bolt to scrutinize the engraving along the side. ‘Somebody has been trying to efface this Souvenir de Carcassonne thing with a file. H’m. And it isn’t as though the person had given it up as a bad job. The s-o-u part is blurred and filed almost out, systematically. It’s as though the person had been interrupted and hadn’t finished his job.’

He put down the bolt glumly. Dr Watson, having evidently satisfied himself that nobody was in a joking mood, had grown more amiable.

‘Well. I’m goin’, he volunteered. ‘Anything, you want to know? No use tellin’ you that did for him .. Clean puncture; plenty of strength behind it. Might have lived half a minute, Hur-umph. Oh yes. Concussion. Might have, got it falling down the steps, or maybe somebody batted him. That’s your job.’

‘What about the time of death, Watson? The doctor here says he died between one-thirty and one-forty-five.’

‘Oh,’ he does, does he?’ said the police surgeon. ‘Wasn’t a bad guess, though. He died about ten minutes to two. I’ll take him along in the ambulance for a good look, and let you know.’

He doddered out, swinging his black bag.

‘But look here!’ protested Sir William, when the door had closed. ‘He can’t possibly know it so exactly, can he? I thought doctors gave a good deal of leeway on a thing like that.’

‘He doesn’t,’ said Hadley. ‘That’s why he’s so invaluable. And in twenty years I’ve never known him more than ten minutes wrong about the, time of death.’

He turned to Laura Bitton.

‘To proceed, Mrs Bitton. Let’s assume that this bolt came from your house. Who knew it was there?’

'Why, everybody, I imagine. I don't remember, but I suppose I must have shown the junk we accumulated on that trip.'

'Had you seen it before, Sir William?'

'I'm not sure,' the other answered, slowly. 'I may, have. But I can't recall ever having seen it. Ah yes. Ha! Now I know, Laura. You and Lester made the trip while I was abroad in the States, and I came back after you. That accounts for it.'

Hadley drew a long breath. 'There's no use speculating,' he said, 'We shall have to make inquiries at the house...and now, Mrs Bitton, I, don't think we need detain you any longer. One of the warders will escort you to a cab. Or perhaps Sir William will do it... And look here, old man he put his hand on the knight's arm 'you've a perfect right to stay, if you like; at least, I shan't try to drive you away.. But you've had a trying day. Don't you think it would be better if you went home with Mrs Bitton?'

'No - I'm waiting to hear what you have to say to Arbor.'

'Which is exactly what you mustn't do, don't you see? It would spoil everything.'

'Tell you what, Bitton,' the General suggested, gruffly, 'go up to my rooms. Parker will give you a cigar and a brandy, and if there's any news we'll let you know. That Devereux record is in the portfolio in my desk; have a look at it.'

Sir William rose to his great height. As he turned towards the woman, Rample turned also and Rample was startled to see on Laura's face an expression of stark terror. It was riot caused by anything she saw; it was the expression of one who remembers something momentarily forgotten; who stops breathless, eyes opening wide. It was gone immediately, and Rample wondered whether Hadley had noticed it.

'I don't suppose I might be allowed to remain?' she asked, in her cool voice. But two kinks were working at the corners of her nostrils, and she seemed 'almost to have stopped breathing. 'I might be helpful.' As Hadley smiled and shook his head, she seemed to weigh something in her mind. Then she shrugged. 'Ah, well. Excuse the morbid curiosity. And I will go home in a cab. Good afternoon, gentlemen.'

She nodded curtly. Followed by her brother-in-law, she swung out

of the room.

'Hum!' said General Mason, after a long pause. The fire was getting low, and he kicked at it. Then he noticed Sergeant Hamper, who had been standing, patient and forgotten, since Dr Watson's entrance; and the general did not continue. 'Oh, ah yes,' the chief inspector coughed, as though he had just noticed it, too. 'Sorry, Hamper, for keeping you waiting. Those are the contents of the pockets you have there, eh? Put them down, and see if you can pick up any news from the chief warder. But before you do, go across the way and find Mrs Amanda Larkin. Wait about five minutes, and send her in here.'

The sergeant saluted and withdrew. Hadley contemplated the small bundle on the desk before him, but he did not immediately open it.

'I say, Mr Hadley,' said the General. 'What did you make of that woman?'

'Mrs Bitton? I wonder. ... She's an old hand at evasion, and a very good one. She sees the traps as soon as you set them. What do you know about her?'

'I'd never met her. But I know her husband slightly, through Bitton.'

'What's this Lester Bitton like?.

'I don't like to say,' the General answered, doubtfully. 'Don't know the man well enough. He's older than she is; considerably, I should think. Can't imagine him enjoying these athletic activities of hers. I believe he made a lot of money in some financial scheme.'

Hadley turned his attention to the handkerchief, knotted up like a bundle, which contained the dead man's effects.

'Here we are. Wrist-watch; crystal broken, but still running. Bunch of keys. Fountain-pen and stylo pencil. Banknotes, silver and coppers. Only one letter.... Pure trash pale mauve envelope, and scented; woman's handwriting.'

He drew out a single sheet of paper, and Rampole and the General bent over it as he spread it out on the table. There was no date or heading. The message was written in the centre of the sheet: 'Be careful. Tower of London, one-thirty. Suspect. Vital.- Mary.'

Hadley read it aloud, scowling. 'Mary?' he repeated. 'Now we've got to find a Mary. Let's see. Postmarked London, W, ten-thirty last night.'

This thing is beginning to get on my nerves.' Pushing the letter out on the desk, he turned to the contents of the handkerchief again. 'I must say the sergeant is thorough. He even included the dead man's ring and tie-pin. But here's our hope. Loose-leaf note-book, black leather.'

Opening the note-book, he let his eye run along the few scrawled lines on the first sheet.

'Listen to this! Notes of some sort, with dashes between. Apparently it's in Driscoll's handwriting:

'"Best place? .. Tower? ... Track down hat ... Unfortunate Trafalgar ... can't transfix ... 10 ... Wood Hedges or shield . Find out".'

'But that's gibberish!' General Mason protested, somewhat superfluously. 'It doesn't mean anything. At least, it may have meant something, but...,'

'But he's left out the connecting words,' Hadley supplied. 'It seems to refer to some clue for following our hat-man.'

'Read that again!' Dr Fell . suddenly boomed from his coreer. On his big face was a blank expression which slowly turned to something like amusementas the chief inspector; repeated the words....

'Mrs Larkin is here, sir,' said the voice of Sergeant Hamper from the door.

A series of chuckles were running down the bulges of Dr Fell's waistcoat. His small eyes twinkled, and ashes' from his pipe were blown about him. He looked like the Spirit of the Volcano.

Mrs Amanda Georgette. Larkin looked about carefully before she entered, rather as though she expected to find a bucket of water balanced on the top of the door. Then she marched in, saw the empty chair beside Hadley's desk, and sat down without further ado. She was a tall, rather heavy, woman, well dressed in dark clothes of the sort called 'sensible'; which word, as in its usual context, means an absence of charm.

Hadley hitched his own chair round. 'Mrs Larkin, I am Chief Inspector Hadley. Naturally, you understand, I dislike having to inconvenience any of you. But you may be able to give us some very important information.'

'Maybe,' grunted Mrs Larkin, hitching her shoulders. 'But, first,

before you ask me any questions, give me your word anything I say will be treated as a confidence.'

Hadley considered gravely. 'I can make no promises. If anything you say has a direct bearing on this investigation, I can't treat it as a confidence. Is that clear?'.. Besides, Mrs Larkin, I'm almost positive I've seen you somewhere before.'

She shrugged, 'Maybe you have, and maybe you haven't. That's as it may be. But there's no slop in the business who's got anything on me. I'm a respectable widow. I don't know anything, about your investigation, and I haven't anything to tell you.'

All this time Mrs Larkin seemed to be having: some difficulty with her cuff. Under her dark coat she, seemed to have on some sort of tailored suit, with turned-up white cuffs; whether the, left-hand one was sliding down, or her capable fingers had a habit of, playing with it, Rampole could not tell. If Hadley, noticed it, he gave no sign.

'Do you know what happened here, Mrs Larkin?'

'Certainly I know. There was enough talk from the crowd over the way.'

'Then you may know that the, dead man is Mr Philip Driscoll, of Tavistock Chambers, Tavistock Square. On the paper you filled out you say that you lived in this building also. What is the number of your flat?'

A brief hesitation. 'Number 1.'

'Number 1. Ground floor, I suppose?' Quite so. You must be an old resident, Mrs Larkin?'

She blazed. 'What the hell difference is it to you? If you've got any complaint to make, make it to the maeager of the flats.'

Again Hadley gravely considered, his hands folded. 'Who would also tell me how long you had been a resident. After all, it can't harm you to give us a bit of assistance, can it?' Some time' - he raised his eyes -'some time it 'might help you a good deal.'

Another hesitation. 'I didn't mean to speak so sharp,' she told him, moving sullenly in the chair. 'Well, if it does you any good, I've been there a few weeks; something like that'

‘That’s better. How many flats on each floor?’

‘Two. Two in each entry of the building.’

‘So,’ Hadley said, musingly, ‘you must have lived directly across the way from Mr Driscoll. Did you know him?’ ‘No. I’ve seen him, that’s all.’

‘Inevitable, of course. And passing in and out, you may have noticed whether he had visitors?’

‘Sure I did. I couldn’t help it. He had lots of people coming to see him.’

‘I was thinking particularly of women.’

For a moment Mrs Larkin scrutinized him with an ugly eye. ‘Yes. There was women. But what about it? Live and let live, that’s what I say. It was none of my business. But if you’re going to ask me who the women were, you can save your breath. I don’t know.’

‘For instance,’ said Hadley. He glanced over at the sheet of mauve notepaper. ‘You never heard the name “Mary used, did you?”’

She stiffened. Her eyes remained fixed on the notepaper, and she stopped fiddling with her cuff.

‘No. I told you I didn’t know him. The only woman’s name I ever heard in connexion with him was on -the up-and-up. It was a little blonde. She used to come with a big thin bird with eyeglasses on. One day she stopped me as I was coming in and asked me how she could find the porter to get into his flat. There’s no hall-porter; it’s an automatic lift. She said her name was Sheila and she was his cousin. And that’s all I ever heard.’

Hadley remained silent for a time.

‘Now, about this afternoon, Mrs Larkin.... How did you happen to come to the Tower of London?’

‘I’ve got a right to come here if I want to. I don’t need to explain why I go to a public building, do I?’

‘When, did you arrive?’

‘Past two o’clock. Mind, I don’t swear to that! I’m not under oath.

That's what time I think it was.'

'Did you make the tour. ...go all round?'

'I went to two of them - Crown Jewels and Bloody Tower. Not the other one. Then I got tired and started out. They stopped me.'

Hadley went through the routine of questions, and elicited nothing. She had been deaf, dumb, and blind. There were other people about her ... she remembered an American cursing the fog ... but she had paid no attention to the others. At length he dismissed her, with the warning that he would probably have future questions.

The moment she had disappeared Hadley hurried to the door. He said to the warder there:

'Find Sergeant Hamper and tell him to put a tail on the woman who's just left here. Hurry! Then tell Hamper to come back here.' he turned back to the desk, thoughtfully beating his hands together.

'Hang it all, man,' General Mason burst out, impatiently, 'why the kid-glove tactics? A little third degree wouldn't have hurt. her. She knows something, right enough. And she probably is a criminal.'

'Undoubtedly, General. But I had nothing to hold over her; and, above all, she's much more valuable on the string. I think we'll find there is nothing against her at present at the Yard. And I'm almost sure we'll find she's a private detective.'

'Ha!' muttered the General. He twisted his moustache. 'A private detective. But why?'

'There are any number of indications. Clearly she has nothing to fear from the police; she challenged that with every word. She lives in Tavistock Square. The neighbourhood isn't "flash" enough for her if she had that much money of her own to spend, and it isn't cheap enough if she had less. I know the type. She has lived there only a few weeks ... just opposite Driscoll. She obviously had paid a great deal of attention to his visitors. She told us only one incident, the visit of his cousin Sheila, because that wouldn't help us; but you notice she had all the details.'

'Then did you see her fumbling at her cuff? She hasn't been in the business long; she was afraid it would show out of the arm of her coat, and she was afraid to take it off over in the Warders' Hall, for fear of looking suspicious.'

‘Her cuff?’

Hadley nodded. ‘These private snoopers who get material for divorces. They have to make notes of times and places quickly, and often in the dark. Oh yes. That’s what she’s up to. She was following somebody this afternoon.’

The General said, ‘Hum!’ He scuffed his feet a moment before asking, ‘Something to do with Driscoll?’

Hadley put his head down in his hands.

‘Yes. You saw the start she couldn’t help giving when she saw that note on my desk. She wasn’t close enough to have read it, but the colour of the paper was enough to identify it .. if she’s ever seen any similar notes in connexion with Driscoll. H’m, yes. But that’s not the point. I strongly suspect that the person she was actually shadowing this afternoon was ... whom do you say, Doctor?’

Dr Fell relighted his pipe. ‘Mrs Bitton, of course. I’m afraid she rather gave herself away, if you listened to what she said.’

‘But, good God!’ muttered the General. ‘You mean to say there’s something between Driscoll and .. H’m. Yes. It fits, I suppose. But where’s your proof?’

‘I haven’t any proof. As I say, it’s only a suspicion.’ Hadley rubbed his chin, ‘Still, let’s take it as a hypothesis for the moment, and work back. Let’s assume Larkin was shadowing Mrs Bitton.... Now, this White Tower, General. That’s the biggest and most important one isn’t it? And it’s some distance away from the Bloody Tower, isn’t it?’

‘Well, yes ... it stands alone; it’s in the middle of the inner ballium walls just beside the parade-ground.’

‘And the tower where the Crown jewels are kept is directly beside the Bloody Tower?’

‘The Wakefield Tower. Yes. Wait a minute!’ said Mason, excitedly. ‘I’ve got it. Mrs Bitton went to see the Crown Jewels. So did Larkin. Mrs Bitton said she wandered up through the arch of the Bloody Tower; and up to the parade-ground.... Larkin’ went to the Bloody Tower. She couldn’t keep too close to Mrs Bitton. And if she went up the stairs of the Bloody Tower to Raleigh’s Walk, she could have seen from a height where Mrs Bitton was going.’

‘That’s what I wanted to ask you,’ said Hadley, knocking his fists against his temples. ‘She couldn’t have seen very far in the mist, of course. It’s more probable she did that - if she did - to keep up the illusion of being a tourist. Or she might, have thought Mrs Bitton had gone into the Bloody Tower. It’s all supposition. But neither of them went to the White Tower, you see.... Those may be coincidences, but when you couple them with the presence of those two women here, and the statements of Mrs Bitton and Larkin, they sound pretty plausible indications.’

‘You’re assuming,’ said the General, pointing to the table, ‘that Mrs Bitton wrote that note?’ -

‘And all the time,’ Hadley mused, ‘suspecting she was being watched, see what the note says: “Be careful. Suspect. Vital.” The letter was posted at ten-thirty last night in Mrs Bitton’s district, after Driscoll had paid a short visit that evening. Mrs Bitton had just come back from a walking tour of Cornwall..., and why, in God’s name, a walking tour in Cornwall in the worst part of March, unless somebody wanted to get her away from a dangerous infatuation?’

‘I’m running on, I suppose. Still, if we assume all this, we must assume it was a dangerous infatuation. For here’s a private detective who has been planted in a flat opposite Driscoll for some weeks, even during the time she and her husband were away! ... Does that mean anything? And who planted her there? Offhand, of course, the husband.!

‘But the name, “Mary”?’ suggested General Mason.

‘I’ve heard many more hilariously funny nicknames whatd’ye call em pet names ... in my time,’ Hadley said, grimly. ‘And the handwriting’s undoubtedly disguised. Even if it were stolen, it couldn’t be used as evidence against her. She’s a clever woman.

‘Do you see the deep waters we’re in now? Come along, Mr Rampole,’ he prompted, turning so suddenly that the American jumped; ‘do you see how it mixes everything up?’

Rampole hesitated. ‘I can see plenty of difficulties,’ he returned. ‘That letter would have been delivered fairly early this morning. Now we’ve been assuming all along that the reason why Driscoll telephoned Mr Dalrye had something to do with the hat-thief and his pursuit of the hat-thief. But Driscoll never actually said it did. Dalrye asked him jokingly, if I remember it right, whether he was afraid of his hat being

stolen. But all Driscoll actually answered was, "It's not my hat I'm afraid of; it's my head." Dalrye thought it referred to the hat affair; but did it?'

He looked bewilderedly at the chief inspector.

'I don't know,' snapped Hadley. 'But he makes that appointment with Dalrye for one o'clock. The appointment in the letter is for one-thirty. He has received the letter that morning; it's scared him, and he wants Dalrye's help. Then some other person sends Dalrye on a wild-goose chase to Driscoll's flat. Driscoll arrived here, in a bad state. He is seen by Parker looking out of the window, and later somebody touches him on the arm by Traitors' Gate.

'What went on in the merry-go-round composed of Driscoll, Mrs Bitton, Larkin, and a possible fourth party? Was it some sort of crime passionel? And if it was, can anybody on this' side of sanity inform me why Driscoll's body should be found wearing Sir William's stolen top-hat? It's the hat thief angle that's mad and impossible.'

There was a pause. Dr Fell took the pipe out of his mouth and spoke rather plaintively.

'I say, Hadley,' he remonstrated. 'You're working yourself up into a lather. Be calm. It'll come out all right. Just keep on in your normal course.'

The chief inspector regarded him bitterly.

'Unless our questioning of the other visitors turns up something,' he said, 'we have only one other person to interview. And thank God. I need a brandy. Several brandies. But for the next few minutes, Doctor, you are going to be the chief inspector. With the next witness it becomes your case. In other words, you are going to examine Julius Arbor.?

'With pleasure,' said the doctor, 'if you'll give me your chair.' He hauled himself to his feet as Hadley summoned the warder on guard and gave instructions. 'It's what I should have asked to do, in any case, Hadley. Because why? Because a good part of the case depends on it. And that side of the case - shall I tell you what that side of the case hinges on, Hadley?'

'You will, anyhow. Well?'

'It hinges on a stolen manuscript,' said Dr Fell.

DR FELL hung his cloak over the back of the chair: Then he squeezed himself into the chair and arranged his various ridges of stomach.

'I don't know whether I ought to let you do this,' said, Hadley. 'I don't want the, General to think we're both mad. And for the love of God try to control your deplorable sense of humour. This is serious business.' He massaged his chin uncomfortably. 'You see, General, in his own way Doctor Fell is invaluable. But he gets his ideas of police procedure from the cinema, and he is under the impression that he can act any sort of part. Whenever I let him question anybody in my presence he tries to give an imitation of me. The result sounds like a schoolmaster with homicidal mania trying to find out what fourth-former spread the axle grease on the, stairs when the headmaster was coming down to dinner

Dr Fell grunted. 'Ha,' he said. 'Your analogy, while classical, supports me rather than you. It seems to me, Hadley, that you are the one who is going about grimly determined to discover who put the barrister's wig on the cabhorse. I'm exactly the detective you want. Besides schoolboys; are much more ingenious than that. Now, an outhouse of medium weight, carefully substituted for the statue of the headmaster on the night before the public unveiling of the latter'

General Mason shook his head. 'Personally,' he observed, frowning at his cigar, 'I remember my own schoolboy holidays in France. And I have always maintained that there is nothing more edifying than the experiment of placing a red lamp over the door of, the mayor's house in a district full of sailors. Ahem!'

'Go ahead,' Hadley said, bitterly. 'Have a good time. I suppose if this case hadn't wound up in a murder you'd be stealing hats yourself, and thinking up new places to hang them!'

There was a knock at the door.

'Pardon me,' said a calm, slightly edged voice. 'I've knocked several times, and there seemed to be no answer. You sent for me, I think.'

Rampole had been wondering what to expect from the enigmatic Mr Julius Arbor. He remembered Sir William's description earlier that afternoon: 'Reserved, scholarly, a trifle sardonic.' The, American had been vaguely expecting someone tall and thin and swarthy, with a hooked nose. The man who entered now, slowly drawing off his

gloves and looking about with cool curiosity, was somewhat swarthy. And in every movement he, was austere. But that was all.

Mr Arbor was not above middle height, and he was inclined towards pudginess. He was perfectly dressed, too well dressed: there was a white pique edging to the front of his waistcoat, and a small pearl pin in his tie ... His face was flattish, with heavy black eyebrows ; and the rimless eye-glasses were such delicate shells that they seemed to blend with his eyes.

'Am I addressing Chief Inspector Hadley?' he inquired.

'Good day,' said Dr Fell, waving his hand affably. 'I'm in charge of the investigation, if that's what you mean. Sit down. I presume you're Mr Arbor.'

Arbor shifted his umbrella from the crook of one arm to hang it over the other; he moved across to the chair, inspected it for dust, and sat down.

'That's better,' said the doctor. 'Now we can begin.' From his pocket he took his battered cigar-case and extended it. 'Smoke!'

'Thank you no' the other answered. He waited until Dr Fell had replaced the disreputable, case. Then he produced an elaborately chased silver cigarette-case of his own, containing long and slender cigarettes with a cork tip. Snapping on a silver lighter, he applied it to a cigarette with nicety.

Dr Fell studied him sleepily, hands folded over his stomach. Arbor seemed to grow a trifle restless. He cleared his throat.

'I do not wish to hurry you, Inspector,' he said at length, 'but I should like to point out that I have been put to considerable inconvenience this afternoon. If you will tell me what you wish to know, I shall be happy to assist you in any way I can?'

Dr Fell nodded. 'Got any Poe manuscripts?' he inquired, rather like a customs officer asking for contraband.

The question was so sudden that Arbor stiffened. A faint frown ruffled his swarthy forehead. 'I don't think I quite understand you. At my home in New York I certainly have a number of first editions of Edgar Allan Poe, and a few of the manuscript originals. But I scarcely think they would be of interest to you. I understand you wished to question me concerning a murder.'

'Oh, the murder!' grunted Dr Fell, with a careless wave of his hand.
'Never mind that.'

'Indeed?' said Arbor. 'I had supposed that the police might have some curiosity concerning it. However, that is none of my affair. I must remark, with Pliny "Quot homines, tot sententiae".'

'It wasn't Pliny,' said the doctor, testily. 'That's an inexcusable blunder. And if you must use that deplorable platitude, try to pronounce it correctly. The "o" in homines is short, and there's no long. nasal sound to the "en" in sententiae. But never mind that. What do you know about Poe?'

Hadley was making weird noises in the corner. Mr Arbor's flattish face had stiffened; the aura about him conveyed anger.

'I am not sure,' he said, quietly, 'that I know what you are driving at or whether this is an elaborate joke. If so, kindly tell me.?

'I'll put it this way, then. Are you interested in Poe? If you were offered the authentic manuscript of one of his stories would you buy it?'

This sudden swoop to the practical put Arbor right again. There was a trace of a smile on his face.,

'Now I see, Mr Hadley,' he said to Dr Fell. 'This tribunal, then, was called because of Sir William Bitton's stolen manuscript. I was a bit puzzled at first.' He smiled again, a mere wrinkle on his pudgy face. Then he considered. 'Yes, I should certainly buy a Poe item if it were offered to me.'

'H'm, yes. You know there has been a theft at Bitton's house, then?'

'Oh yes. And you, Inspector, know that I am stopping at Bitton's home. I should say,' Arbor corrected himself, impassively, 'I was stopping there. To-morrow I shall remove

myself to the "Savoy".'

'Why?'

'Let's be frank, Mr Inspector. I am aware of what Bitton thinks. I am not insulted. We must accept these little things. But I dislike awkwardness. You see; or don't you?'

'Do you know the nature of the manuscript that was stolen?'

'Perfectly. In point of fact, I had some intention of intending to buy it?'

'He told you about it, then, did he?'

The flattish face was a polite mask of depreciation. 'You know he didn't. But Bitton is like a child, if I may say so. I have heard him let fall enough mysterious hints at the dinner table for even his family to guess the nature of his find. However, I knew all about the manuscript before I left the States.'

He chuckled. It was the first human, sound Rampole had heard out of him.

'I dislike commenting on the infantile nature of some of these gentlemen, but I fear Doctor Robertson, who had been Bitton's confidant, was indiscreet'

Dr Fell thoughtfully took the handle of his stick, which was lying across the desk, and poked at the crossbow bolt. Then he glanced up amiably.

'Mr Arbor, would you have stolen that manuscript, if you were given the opportunity?'

Across the room Rampole saw the despairing expression on Hadley's face. But Arbor was not in the least perturbed.

'No, Inspector, I don't think I would,' he replied. 'It would entail so much awkwardness, you see. And I dislike violating hospitality in that fashion. Don't misunderstand me. I have no moral scruples, and it might seriously be questioned as to whether Bitton has any right to it at all.'

'But suppose somebody offered to sell you that manuscript, Mr Arbor?'

Arbor took off his delicate eyeglasses and polished them with a white silk handkerchief. He was easy, smug, and half smiling now. The black eyebrows were wrinkled with amusement.

'Let me tell you a story, Inspector. The police should know; it, to support, my claim in case it is - ah - successful.' Before I came to England I went to Philadelphia and looked up Mr Joseph McCartney,

of Mount Airy Avenue, who owns the property on which the manuscript was found. For the fact that it was found there I had the testimony of three honest labouring men. I laid my case with a tolerable degree of frankness before Mr McCartney. He was the owner. I informed him that if he would give me three months' written option on that manuscript, wherever it might be, I would hand him one thousand dollars in cash. There was also - another agreement. It specified that, if the manuscript proved to be what I wanted (the decision to rest with me), I should pay him four thousand dollars for a complete sale.'

'Actually, Mr Arbor, what is the manuscript worth?' Dr Fell asked, leaning forward.

'I should be willing to go as high as, say, ten thousand pounds.'

General Mason, who had been scowling and pulling at his imperial, interrupted. 'But, my God! man, that's fantastic! No Poe manuscript ...'

'I venture to predict,' Arbor said, placidly, 'that this one would. It is the first analytic detective story in the history of the world. It antedates Poe's own Murders in the Rue Morgue. Dr Robertson informs me that even from an artistic point of view it surpasses Poe's other three Dupin crime tales... , I could name you offhand three fellow collectors who would go as high as twelve or fifteen. And I enjoy thinking what it would fetch at auction - where, I need not tell you, I intend to place it'

Dr Fell cleared his throat with a rumbling noise.

'How do you know this? Have you seen the manuscript?'

'I have the word of Dr Robertson, the greatest living authority on Poe. He only told me all this because - well, Inspector, my wine-cellar is considered excellent. And even Imperial Tokay is cheap at the price. Of course, he regretted his indiscretion next day; he had promised Bitton, and he begged me to take no action. I was sorry.'

'Then,' said Dr Fell, 'it wasn't a mere matter of a find you were interested in? You were after this, manuscript to sell it?'

'It was, my dear Inspector. The manuscript - wherever it is - happens to belong to me. I may remind you . Shall I, go on?'

By all means'

‘My business with Mr McCartney was easily settled,’ Arbor continued comfortably. ‘He seemed staggered. It was incredible to him that any written document could be worth five thousand dollars. I found in Mr McCartney a great reader of sensational fiction.... My next move - you follow it, Inspector?’

‘You got yourself, invited to Bitton’s house,’ grunted Dr Fell.;

‘Not exactly. I had a standing invitation there. As a rule, I do not stay with friends when I am in London. I own a cottage in the suburbs, at which I often stay in summer; and in winter I go to a hotel. But, you see, I had to be tactful. He was a friend.

‘I could not, of course, say to him, “Bitton, I think you have a manuscript of mine. Hand it over.” That would have been distasteful, and, I thought, unnecessary. I expected him to show me his find voluntarily. Then I would lead up to my subject by gradual degrees, explain the unfortunate “circumstances, and make him a fair offer. ’

‘Now, Inspector - and gentlemen - that was difficult. You know Bitton? Ah. I knew him as a headstrong, stubborn, f and secretive fellow; rather a monomaniac on cherishing his discoveries. But I had not expected him to be quite so difficult. He did not speak of his find, as I had expected. For some days I hinted. I thought he was merely obtuse, and I fear my hints grew so outrageously broad that they puzzled even his family. But I am aware now that he must have known, and suspected me. He merely kept his mouth more tightly closed. It was distasteful to me - but I was coming to the point where I should have to claim my rights.’ Under the law,’ said Arbor, his leisurely voice growing suddenly harsh, ‘I was not required to pay him a penny for my property.!’

‘The sale had not been concluded between you and Mc Cartney, had it?’ inquired Dr Fell. ;

Arbor shrugged. ‘Virtually. I had my option. Of course, I was not willing to hand over five thousand dollars on a manuscript I had never seen, even on the word of Dr Robertson; and a manuscript, besides, which might conceivably have been lost or destroyed by the time I came to claim it. However, to all intents and purposes it was mine.’

‘Did you tell Bitton you were the owner, then?’

Arbor’s nostrils tightened with anger. ‘Obviously not. Or would he have been so mad as to do what he did - seek the aid of the police when it was stolen?

‘But before that. Consider the difficulty of my position. I began to see that, if I asked him outright, this – ah - this, lunatic might make all sorts of trouble. He would probably refuse, and question my rights. My rights could be proved; but it would mean delay and, all sorts of unpleasantness. He might maintain he, had lost the manuscript, and that would be worse.’

Mr Arbor's aura conveyed an acute spasm of anguish at this thought. General Mason coughed, and Dr Fell contrived to twist his moustache with a hand that hid his mouth.

‘And at this juncture,’ continued the other, ‘everything blew up. The manuscript was stolen. And I, you notice, I was the loser.

‘Now, gentlemen.’ He sat back and gazed about, fixing the eye of each in turn. ‘Now you will understand why I have gone into such thorough explanations, and why I wish to establish the ownership of that manuscript. Bitton undoubtedly thinks I stole it. I am not particularly concerned with what he thinks ; but I cannot have the police thinking so.’

‘I was away over the week-end during which the manuscript was stolen, and I arrived back only this morning. I was visiting Mr and Mrs Spengler, some friends of mine who live close to that cottage of my own I mentioned, at Golders Green. “Ah,” says the cunning Bitton ; “an alibi.” And he has the impudence to telephone them in order to confirm it. “Ah,” he says then; “it was done by somebody in his employ.”

‘Now, all this might be at least remotely possible in Bitton's wild imagination. But why, in the name of Heaven, should I go to all the trouble of stealing a manuscript which was already mine?’

There was a silence. Hadley, who had perched himself on the edge of the desk, nodded.

‘I suppose, Mr Arbor,’ he said, ‘you are prepared to prove this claim of yours?’

‘Naturally. An agreement between Mr McCartney and myself was drawn up by my lawyer in New York and duly attested. A copy of this agreement is now filed with my solicitors in London.’

Hadley lifted his shoulders. ‘In that case, Mr Arbor, there is nothing more to, be said. Sir William simply took a chance that his discovery would go unnoticed.’ Hadley spoke coldly and levelly. ‘Even if you had

abstracted the manuscript, to avoid trouble at Sir William's hands, the law could do nothing.'

Mr Arbor's aura radiated a sort of sputter, like a muffled wireless-key.

'We'll let that pass,' be observed, with an effort. 'The absurdity of your suggestion is as evident as - ah your somewhat noticeable manners. That a man of my well-known standing. 'The aura sputtered again. Then Mr Arbor recovered himself. 'It would amuse some, of my associates in New York,' he said. 'Ha, ha. Ha. Very amusing. But, as I think we agreed to begin with, perfectly legal.'

'Not if it concerned a murder,' said Dr Fell.

There was an abrupt and rather terrible silence.

The doctor had spoken in a casual tone. In the stillness they could all hear the last rattle of coals falling in the grate, and, very faintly, the thin sudden note of a bugle from the parade-ground.

Arbor had been gathering his coat about him to rise, and his hand jerked on the lapel. 'I - I beg your pardon?' he said.

'I said, "Not if it concerned a murder,"' Dr Fell repeated in a louder voice. 'Don't get up, Mr Arbor. Were going to talk about the murder now. That doesn't surprise you, does it?' His half-closed eyes opened wide. 'Don't you know who was murdered, Mr Arbor?' he pursued.

'I - I heard them talking over there,' the other answered, regarding his interrogator fixedly. 'I think I heard somebody say his name was Drakell or Driscoll or something of the sort.'

'The name was Driscoll, Philip Driscoll. He was Sir William Bitton's nephew.'

Whatever sort of effect Dr Fell had hoped to produce, there was no question about an effect. Arbor's swarthy face turned white; literally white, for mottled blotches stood out against; his pallor. The thin eyeglasses jerked on his nose, and he covered them with a shaking hand. Undoubtedly Arbor had a weak heart. The effect was as much physical as nervous.

'You must - you must excuse me, gentlemen, he muttered. His voice grew stronger. 'I it was the shock of hearing the name of - somebody - I did know. This - this Driscoll, was he a small young man, with - let

me see - with reddish hair?'

‘Yes,’ said Dr Fell. ‘You did know him, then?’

‘I met him - ah - Sunday before last, at dinner in Bitton’s house. It was the day. I arrived. I hadn’t caught his last name. They all called him Phil; that’s how I remembered. How did he die?’

‘He was stabbed with this crossbow bolt,’ said Dr Fell, picking it up.
‘It comes from Bitton’s house.’

The other said, ‘Most interesting - ’ in a way that sounded like a horrible burlesque. But he was better now. ‘I don’t want you to think, gentlemen, that I know anything of the poor boy’s murder because I seemed - ah - upset when you mentioned it. After all, murderers don’t do that, do they? ‘It would be too easy if they did. A person with courage enough to use one of those vicious-looking things isn’t apt to faint when it’s produced afterwards.. Bitton ... poor devil. Does he know?’

‘He knows, Mr Arbor. But about young Driscoll : you can’t think of any reason for his murder?’

‘My dear sir, no! No, of course not. I only met him once, at that dinner. I haven’t seen him since.’

‘He was killed, at the Traitors’ Gate out there,’ pursued Dr Fell, nodding, ‘and his body thrown on the steps. I don’t suppose you noticed anything suspicious while you were there?’

‘No. What I - er - wanted to tell you when I first came in was that it was only by chance I was detained here at all. You see, I wanted to examine that copy of Sir Walter Raleigh’s History o f the World which is on display at the Bloody Tower, in the room where he wrote it. I arrived here shortly after one o’clock, and went directly to the Bloody Tower. I presented my card to the warder on duty, and asked whether I might make a detailed examination. He said he was sorry, but that it was a part of the Tower exhibits and that I couldn’t handle it without a written order from the resident governor or deputy governor. Even then, he said, it was doubtful whether I could get the order. But I asked to be directed to where I might find either one. He sent me across the way... ’

‘Inside the ballium wall?’ Hadley interrupted.

‘Yes. To a row of buildings facing up towards; the Green and the

parade-ground. But it was foggy, and there were several doors, and I was uncertain. When I hesitated, a man came out of one of the doors.'

'A man in knickerbockers and a cap?' Dr Fell inquired.

'I don't know. Er - yes, I believe he did wear knickerbockers I recall it because they seemed a bit absurd on such a day. But it was foggy, and I could not swear to it. I spoke to him to find out which door I should use, but he brushed past me without listening. Then another warder hailed me and told me that visitors were not permitted on the side of the grounds where I was walking. I explained. He then said he was positive neither of the persons I wanted to see were in their quarters at the time.'

'Quite correct,' said General Mason, dryly.

'But surely, gentlemen !' Arbor protested, wetting his lips, 'surely you can't be interested.... You are? Well, let me see. I returned to the Bloody Tower and tried the judicious use of a bank-note. It was not accepted. So I determined to leave. On my way out to Water Lane I collided with a young lady who had just come under the arch of the gate from Water Lane and was walking very rapidly up the incline that goes towards the parade-ground!'

'Could you describe this young lady?'

'No, I'm afraid 'not. I scarcely glanced at her. All I remember is that she was in a great hurry, and that she wore some sort of fur collar, and that she seemed ah uncommonly solid. It gave me a jar when we bumped. My wristwatch was a bit loose, and I thought it had slipped off. Well, I walked through the arch of the Bloody Tower, into Water Lane.... '

'Now, Mr Arbor, for the Lord's sake think! Think! Was there anybody near the railing around Traitors' Gate then? Did you see anybody standing there?'

Arbor sat back. 'I begin to see the drift,' he answered, nervously. 'I didn't go close to the rail, or look over. But there was nobody standing near it, Inspector. Nobody!'

'And could you remember the time then?'

'I can tell you the time precisely,' said the other. 'It was just twenty-five minutes to two.'

The Three Hints

IT was the placid Hadley who was momentarily jarred out of his calm then. 'But look here!' he protested, 'the police surgeon said he died at a quarter to....'

'Hold on!' bellowed Dr Fell. He struck the top of the desk such a sharp blow with his cane that the sheet of mauve notepaper fluttered, off. 'That's what I was hoping and waiting for. And to think I never took this man's testimony of the murder before! I nearly passed it up; My friend, I am grateful. I am profoundly grateful. ... Now, you're absolutely positive of that time, are you?'

'Positive. As I told you, my encounter with the young lady had jarred my watch. I stepped back into the door of the Wakefield Tower to see whether it was in danger of slipping off, and I noted the time just before I walked down to Water Lane.'

'Get out your watches, gentlemen,' rumbled Dr Fell, 'and let's compare notes. Eheu! So! it's a quarter past six.'

That's what I have, anyhow. What about the rest of you?' 'Quarter past six,' said General Mason. 'Thirteen and a half minutes past,' said Rampole.

'And I?' concluded Arbor. 'Fifteen and one half minutes past, to the second. I never am wrong. This watch was made by...'

'Never mind,' interposed Dr Fell. 'We shan't row about half a minute. There is, however, one thing I should like to ask. You said you were on your way out at this time, Mr Arbor. But the murder wasn't discovered until half-past two. How is it you were caught here when the detention order was issued?'

'I left one of my gloves behind, on the railing round the Raleigh first-edition in the Bloody Tower. They're - ah - rather special gloves,' he explained, carelessly. 'Carter of Fifth Avenue does them for me, and I have no other pair of exactly this sort.'

General Mason looked pained, and Arbor lifted the shiny grey hat from his lap and indicated the gloves.

'I was all the way to the Strand in my cab before I remembered, and I returned. It was about twenty minutes to three when I arrived, and

then I couldn't, get out.'

'I hope that cabby isn't still waiting,' the General mused. 'It would be unfortunate,' Mr Arbor, if such an unfortunate witness got his head bashed in. Hold on! Wait! I remember now. There's something I wanted to ask, you.'

'With pleasure.' Arbor frowned. 'You are ... ?'

'I'm the man you wanted to see,' the General replied, with some asperity. 'I'm the deputy governor of the Tower. And what's more, sir, I'm damned if I let you paw over that Raleigh book. General Sir Ian Hamilton presented that to us. What was I saying? Oh yes. About the Raleigh. You said you had never seen it. Is this your first visit to the Tower?'

'It is.'

'The reason I asked is that you have all the names down pat. You speak familiarly of "Water Lane", and the Green, and all the rest of it, when you didn't go any farther than the Bloody Tower.'

'Perfectly simple,' said, Arbor, with the air of a detective speaking to his dull-witted assistant. 'I dislike, asking directions.' From his pocket he produced one of the green pamphlets. 'This little guide, with a map, which I studied before entering the Tower at all, gave me a thorough working knowledge.'

Dr Fell pulled at his moustache.

'I've got just one more question, my friend, and then you are free to go. Are you acquainted with Mrs Lester Bitton, your host's sister-in-law?'

'Unfortunately, no. You see, as I told you, I have never before stopped at Bitton's house. Mr and Mrs Bitton were away when I first arrived. They returned last night. I am told, but I only came back from my week-end this morning, and both were out of the house.'

'You wouldn't recognize her, then, if you saw her?'

'I'm afraid not.'

'Before you go, though,' Hadley suggested, 'isn't there something you want to tell us?'

Arbor had risen with almost a shake of relief. He was buttoning his coat slowly, so as not to 'seem in a hurry; but he stopped. 'Tell you? I don't understand.'

'Any hints, or instructions, Mr Arbor? A valuable manuscript virtually belonging to you has been stolen, you know. Aren't you interested in, recovering it? It would seem that you are very easily diverted from the loss of a ten-thousand pound possession, considering the trouble you took to acquire it. Aren't you making any inquiries at all?'

Arbor, Rampole sensed, had been dreading that question. But he did not immediately speak. He adjusted his hat to a nicety, drew on his gloves, and hooked his umbrella over his arm.

'Just so,' he agreed. 'But you are forgetting something. I want no unpleasantness in this matter, gentlemen; I have already outlined my reasons. I prefer not to use the assistance of the police. But I assure you I have not been idle. I have made certain contacts and leads which are - excuse me - not open to you. Good day, gentlemen.'

After he had gone there was a long silence. An expression of malignancy was on General Mason's face. He moved his hands in the air after the fashion of a burlesque hypnotist.

'Hocus-pocus,' he muttered. 'Allagazam. I hope you haven't got any more witnesses, Hadley. That's enough. First hats, and then love-affairs, and now manuscripts; It hasn't helped any. It's only mixed us up worse... What did you make of our aesthete?'

'As a witness,' said Hadley, 'he was either too difficult or too easy, at various times. He started off smoothly enough. Then he went, into a complete funk at the mention of the murder. Finally, I'd swear he was, telling the truth when he described what he knew of the happenings here.'

'Meaning?' prompted the General.

'He obviously didn't know it was Driscoll who had been murdered here. At least, he didn't know it was the young chap he'd met at Sir William's. And it nearly knocked him over when he heard. Why?

'Put it this way. Arbor's clever, and he's tricky. He dislikes unpleasantness, because it upsets his own self-conscious dignity; but he has no more courage than a rabbit. You could see that in everything he said. Agreed?'

‘Without a struggle,’ said the General.

‘All right. Now, he tried to make a joke out of the suggestion that he himself might have stolen that manuscript. But when you know Arbor’s character, and Sir William’s, it isn’t quite so fantastic as it sounds. He knew the old man would raise thirty-eight different kinds of hell if he demanded his manuscript. But if the thing were stolen, Sir William could whistle for it. He had no case. Arbor could point all this out to him (by telephone, if necessary) after he’d safely got the manuscript and left the house.’

‘I doubt whether Arbor would actually pinch the manuscript himself,’ said the General, shaking his head. ‘He wouldn’t dare?’

‘Wait a minute. Now, he wasn’t worried about that theft. He wasn’t exerting himself, you see. Well, who might have stolen it for him?’

The General whistled. ‘You mean ...’

‘It can’t be!’ snapped the chief inspector. ‘It would be too much. But the possibility stares us right in the face. I mean this. Arbor said he talked Poe in that house until even the family began to wonder; broader and broader hints. He also said that with the dark and mysterious hints Sir William constantly let fall, everybody must have known about, the manuscript. Certainly a clever young fellow like Driscoll couldn’t, have failed to know it. And. Driscoll was there to dinner when Arbor did much of his talking....’

‘Oh, look here!’ General Mason protested. ‘An infernal counter-jumper like Arbor might have done it, of course. But if you’re suggesting young Driscoll ... Out of the question.’

‘I didn’t say it was true,’ Hadley said, patiently. ‘But consider, Driscoll was discontented. Driscoll was always short of money. So suppose he takes Arbor aside and says, “Look here, if you happened to find that manuscript under your pillow one morning, what would it be worth to you?”’ Hadley raised his eyebrows. ‘Perhaps Arbor then explained, as he might, that he was really the owner. Perhaps that didn’t matter to Driscoll. But, since Arbor would have had to pay some sort of price to the old man if he bought it outright well? It was a good chance for a stroke of business.’

‘NO!’ boomed a thunderous voice.

Hadley jumped. There had been in that voice not only protest, but a sort of agonized appeal. They all turned to see Dr Fell lumbering to his

feet.

'I beg of, you,' he said, almost imploringly - 'I beg; and plead with you, whatever else you think of, anything in this case, not to get that absurd idea. If you do, Hadley, I warn you, you'll never, see the truth. Say whatever else you like. Say that the thief was Arbor, if you like. Say that it was General Mason or Father Christmas or Mussolini. But don't, I entreat you ever for a moment believe it was Driscoll.'

The chief inspector was peevish. 'Well, why not?'

'Cast your minds back a couple of hours. Damn it, where's my pipe? Ah. Well, we were speaking of Driscoll. And Sir William said he wasn't a coward. But one thing he most definitely did fear.'

And that?'

'He feared his uncle,' said Dr Fell. After a pause, while he spilled a considerable amount of tobacco in filling his pipe, he went on wheezily: 'Look, here. Driscoll was an improvident sort, with expensive tastes. He lived entirely off his uncle's bounty. He got precious little from what freelance newspaper work he did, and Bitton helped him get along even with that.'

'But - Bitton wasn't an' indulgent uncle. Quite to the contrary. He was always quarrelling with his nephew on some point or other. And why? Because he was so fond of him.'

He had no son of his own. He had risen from small beginnings, and he wanted to see the boy exhibit some of his own violent energy. And do you think Driscoll didn't know that? Ha!' said the doctor, snorting. 'Of course he did. The old man might squeeze the purse strings tighter than a slip knot.' But : Driscoll knew he was the old man's favourite. And when it came to the last . I rather suspect Driscoll figured conspicuously in the old man's will Didn't he, General Mason?'

'I happen to know,' the General said, rather guardedly, 'that he wasn't forgotten.'

'So, Hadley, are you really mad enough to think the; boy would have endangered all that? Why, that manuscript was literally Bitton's most cherished possession. You saw how he gloated. If Driscoll had stolen it, and he ever had the faintest suspicion Driscoll had stolen it, out the boy would have gone for ever. You know Bitton's temper and, above all, his stubbornness. And what had Driscoll to gain? At most a few pounds from Arbor. Why should Arbor, a good man of business,

give money to a thief for his own property? He would simply smile in that mincing way of his. "A thousand guilders? Come, take fifty! Or I might tell your uncle where you got this manuscript." - No, Hadley. The last thing in the world Driscoll would have done would have been to dare steal it. The person he feared most, I tell you, was his uncle.'

Hadley nodded thoughtfully

'Yes. Yes,' he said, 'that's true. But why are you so aggressive on the point?'

Dr Fell sighed. He was very much relieved.

'Because, if you understand that, you're half-way, along the right track. I ..' Wearily he raised his eyes to the door at another of the inevitable knocks. He went on vigorously: 'But I was going to say that I absolutely refuse to listen to another witness this afternoon. It's past six and the pubs are open.'

A very tired looking Sergeant Betts entered.

'I've just been talking to the other visitors, sir,' he said to Hadley. 'And I'm afraid it's been a long job. They all wanted to talk, and I had to listen for fear of missing something. But not one of them knew anything whatever, so I let them go Was that correct sir?'

'Yes. But keep those names and addresses in case you need them.' Wearily Hadley passed a hand over his eyes. He hesitated, and then looked at his watch. 'H'm. Well, it's getting late, sergeant, and we'll run along. I'll take charge of these articles on the table.'

He took down his overcoat and donned it slowly.

'Well, gentlemen,' said General Mason, 'that seems to be all for the moment. And I think we could all deal with a large brandy and soda. If you'll do me the honour to come up to my rooms ...?'

Hadley hesitated ; but he looked at his watch again, and shook his head.

'Thanks, General. It's good of you, but I'm afraid I can't. I have to get back to the Yard; I've the devil's own lot of routine business, you know, and I've taken far too much time as it is. I shouldn't be handling the affair at all.' He frowned. 'Besides, I think it's best that none of us go up. Sir William will be waiting for you, General. You know him best and you had better tell him everything. About Arbor, you see.?

'Hum! I'm bound to admit I don't like the job,' the other said. 'But I suppose you're right.'

'Tell him we shall probably pay him a visit in Berkeley Square tonight, and to be sure everybody is at home.' Oh - yes. And the newspapers. There will be reporters here soon, if they're not being held outside already. For the Lord's sake don't say anything yourself. Just say, "I have no statement to make at the present time," and refer them to Sergeant Hamper.'

He was already gathering up the objects which had been in Driscoll's pocket. Rampole handed him an old newspaper from the top of a bookcase; he wrapped the crossbow bolt inside it and stowed it away in the breast pocket of his overcoat.

'Right you are. But at least,' said the general, 'let me give you a stirrup cup before you go.' He went to the door and spoke a few words. In a remarkably short time the impassive Parker appeared, bearing a tray with a bottle of whisky, a siphon, and four glasses.

'Well,' he continued, watching the-soda foam as Parker mixed the drinks, 'this has been an afternoon. If it weren't for poor Bitton and the damnable closeness of this thing, I should even call it entertaining. But I'm bound to say I can't make head or tail of it.'

'You wouldn't call it entertaining,' Hadley asserted, moodily, 'if you had my job. And yet - I don't know.' There was a wry smile under his clipped moustache. He accepted a glass and stared into it. 'I've been thirty years in this game, General. And yet I can't help getting something like a quickened pulse when I see "Scotland Yard has been called in on the case." What's the magic in the damned name? I don't know. I'm a part of it. Sometimes I am it. But I'm still as intrigued as a naive old dodderer like Dr Fell.'

'But I always thought you were dead against amateurs,' said the General. 'Of course you can hardly call the doctor, an amateur, but...'

Hadley shook his head. 'Sir Basil Thomson, one of the greatest men the Yard ever had, used to say that a detective had to be jack of all trades and a master of none. The only thing I regret about the doctor here is the deliberate way he patterns himself after the detectives in sensational fiction; of which, by the way, he's an omnivorous, reader. His silences. His mysterious "Aha's!" his....'

'Thank you,' rumbled Dr Fell, satirically. He had put on his cloak and his long shovel-hat. Stumping round near the door, he accepted a

glass from Parker. 'Hadley,' he continued, 'that's an outworn maxim, and a baseless slur on a noble branch of literature. You say that the detective in fiction is mysterious and slyly secret. All right ; but he only reflects real life. What about the genuine detective? He is the one who looks mysterious, says "Aha!" and assures everybody that there will be an arrest within twenty-four hours.. In other words, he has all the pose, whether he has the knowledge or not. But, like the fictional detective, very sensibly he doesn't tell what he thinks, for the excellent and commonplace reason that he may be wrong.'

'All right,' said Hadley, - resignedly. 'If you like. Well, good health, gentlemen .. !' He drained his glass and put it down. 'I suppose, doctor, this is a preamble to some mysterious predictions of yours?'

'I hadn't thought of doing so,' he replied. 'But as a matter of fact, I will give you three hints about what I think. I won't elaborate them' - his scowl became ferocious as he saw Hadley's grin 'because I may be wrong. Ha!'

'I thought so. Well, number one?'

'Number one is this. There was some dispute about the time Driscoll died. The only period in which we seem absolutely to be able to fix it lies between one-thirty when he was seen by Parker lighting a cigarette at the rail in front of Traitors' Gate, and ten minutes to two, which is the time

Doctor Watson said he died. Mr Arbor, coming into Water Lane at twenty-five minutes, to two, was positive there was nobody near the rail.'

'I don't see any implication there,' General Mason said, after a pause; 'unless it's the implication that Arbor was lying. What's your second hint?'

'The second hint,' Dr Fell answered, 'concerns that crossbow bolt. It was, as you saw, filed sharp into a deadly weapon. Now you are assuming, quite naturally, that this filing was done by the murderer.' We have also noticed that the same hand had started to file off those words, Souvenir de Carcassonne, but had stopped with three letters neatly effaced, and gone no farther.... Why weren't those other letters effaced? When we found the body, we were of course bound to learn of the bolt Mrs Bitton purchased at Carcassonne, and, since the victim was Driscoll, it would be too monstrous to assume a mere coincidence. I repeat: why weren't those letters effaced?'

'Yes,' said Hadley. 'I'd thought of that point, too. I hope you're sure of the answer. I'm not. And the third hint?'

By this time Dr Fell, and the black ribbon of his eyeglasses, quivered to his chuckle.

'And the third hint,' he said, 'is very short. It is a simple query. Why did Sir William's hat fit him?'

With a capacious tilt of his head he swallowed off his drink, glanced blandly, about the group, pushed open the door, and shouldered out into the mist.

10

Eyes in a Mirror

THE great clock in Westminster tower struck eight-thirty.

Dorothy had not been at the hotel when Rampole and the doctor arrived there on their return from the Tower. A note left for Rampole at the desk informed him that Sylvia Somebody, who had been at school with her, was taking her home for a gathering of some of the other old girls. Owing, she said, to previous knowledge of her husband's passionate aversion to jolly little evenings of this kind, she had informed them that he was in the hospital with a violent attack of delirium tremens. She said he was to give her love to Dr Fell; and not to forget to pin the name of his hotel to his coat lapel so that the cabman would know where to put him at the end of the evening.

Rampole and the doctor dined at a little French restaurant in Wardour Street. Hadley, who had gone to Scotland Yard immediately after leaving the Tower, had promised to meet them there for a visit to the Bitton home that night. Dr Fell dug himself in behind a steaming parapet of dishes and a formidable array of wine-bottles; but throughout the meal he steadily refused to discuss crime.

On any other subject, however, it was practically impossible to stop him. He discussed in turn the third Crusade, the origin of the Christmas cracker, Sir Richard Steele, Beowulf, and Buddhism. It was eight-thirty before they finished dinner. Rampole, comfortably lazy and warmed with wine, had just sat back for the lighting of the cigars when Hadley arrived.

The chief inspector was restless, and drew up a chair without removing his overcoat.

'I'll have a sandwich and a whisky with you,' he said, in reply to Dr Fell's invitation.

The doctor peered at him over the flame of the match for his cigar.

'Developments?'

'Serious ones, I'm afraid. At least two unforeseen things have occurred. One of them I can't make head or tail of.' He began to rummage in his brief-case and draw out papers. 'To begin with, somebody broke into Driscoll's flat about a quarter to five o'clock this afternoon.'

'Broke into ...'

'Yes. Here are the facts, briefly. You remember, when we questioned that Larkin woman I left orders to have her shadowed. Fortunately, Hamper had an excellent man there a plain-clothes constable, new man, whose only talent seems to be along that line. He took up Larkin's trail as [soon as](#)

she left the gates. She walked straight up Tower Hill, without hesitating.

'At the top of Tower Hill she cut across and went into the Mark Lane Underground Station. There was a queue in front of the booking-office, and Somers couldn't get close enough to hear the station to which she booked. But Somers had a hunch. He took a ticket to Russell Square, which is the tube station nearest to where she lives. She changed at King's Cross, and then he knew he was right. He got out after her at the Russell Square station in Bernard Street, and followed her down Woburn Place to Tavistock Square.

She went into the third entry of Tavistock Chambers. Somers walked straight in after her, like a fool. But it's fortunate he did.

'He describes it as a rather narrow entry, badly lighted by a door with a glass panel at the rear, and with an automatic lift in the centre. The doors to the two flats on that floor are on either side. He had seen her closing the door of No.1 after her. And, at the same time she was going in, a woman slid out of the door of No. 2, darted past the lift, down a couple of steps, and out of the glass door at the back.'

'The woman again, eh?' said Dr Fell, blowing out smoke placidly.
'Did he catch a glimpse of her?'

‘There were no lights on, and what with the mist, the darkness of the hall, and the sudden run she made, he could just be sure it was a woman. Of course, he wasn't sure that anything was wrong. But as a matter of caution, he went close and looked at the door, and then he was sure.

‘The lock of the door had been splintered out from, the jamb with some sharp instrument like a chisel or a heavy screwdriver. Somers ran down the way she had gone. The glass door opened on a large paved court, with a driveway going out to the street. Of course, the woman was gone. And Somers came back.’

‘Now, at the time he didn't know Driscoll lived there he only knew the Larkin woman did, from what instructions he'd been given. But he struck a match and saw the card on the door, and then he was inside in a hurry.

‘The place was in a wild state of disorder; somebody had been searching for something.. Somers went out after the porters and had the devil's own time finding him. The porter is an old man, rather deaf, and he was in a bad state when Somers made him understand what had happened. The only person he had seen there that afternoon was a young man who had been there many times before, and had a key. He knew he hadn't burgled the place, because he had met the young man coming out of the door of the flat, and walked out to his car with him, and he knew everything had been in order then. Somers explained he meant a woman, who had, been there just a moment ago; and the porter refused to believe him.’

‘Had anything been stolen from the flat?’ Dr Fell inquired.

‘We can't tell yet. I haven't seen the place, but one of my best men is up there now. According to Somers' report, the desk had been broken open, every drawer in the flat ransacked, and most of Driscoll's papers scattered over the floor.’

‘In search for some sort of letter or document?’

‘Apparently. And I think we have an explanation of ‘Mary’’

‘I rather thought we should,’ said the doctor.

‘One thing in the study struck Somers' eye because it seemed so out of place. It was your typical bachelor digs: hunting-prints, leather chairs, a silver cup or two, sport groups, things' like that. But on the mantelpiece were two plaster figures on bases, painted in bright

colours - a man and a woman. They wore what Somers called "old-time clothes; like the ones in Madame Tussaud's," and they were labelled ... '

Dr Fell raised his' eyebrows and grunted. 'I see. Philip II and Mary Tudor. They probably got them at some outing together, and kept them for the sentimental remembrance. Well who was the woman?'

The waiter brought Hadley a ham sandwich and a; stiff whisky and soda. He took a pull at the latter before he answered.

'It looks fairly clear, doesn't it, after what we decided this afternoon?' he demanded. 'It had to be somebody who already knew about the murder. She would realize that, with Driscoll dead, his papers would be examined immediately. And if there were any letters that incriminate

her.- ?'

In short, Mrs Bitton,' said Dr Fell. 'No, I don't have any doubt you're right.' Let's see. We questioned her before we questioned Larkin, didn't we? And then let her go.'

'Yes. And think back, now! Do you remember just before she was about to leave ... ? Ah, Rampole, you remember it, I can see. You noticed?

The American nodded. 'Just for a moment; an expression of real and close terror. She seemed to remember something?

'And do you recall what General Mason had just said? I saw the expression on her face, and I tried to account for it; but I understand now. General Mason had been urging Sir William to go up to his rooms and rest, and he said, "The Devereux record is in the portfolio on my desk." And that instantly suggested to her the damning evidence that might be lying in Driscoll's desk for the police to discover. Evidently she has called herself ; "Mary" only since she had reason to believe she was being watched.'

'But would she have had time to get up to Driscoll's flat and do all this?' Rampole asked. 'We didn't talk very long with Mrs Larkin. And Sir William went out to put Mrs Bitton into a cab ...'

'Which she dismissed at the top of Tower Hill for the Underground. She could have gone from Mark Lane to King's Cross in less than fifteen minutes; she could have even saved the risk of time lost in

changing trains by getting out at King's Cross and walking to Tavistock Square. Oh yes. The taxi would have been much too slow. ... And as for getting into the flat, you've only got to take one look at her to realize that she could have broken open a much less flimsy door with no particular trouble. The deaf porter wouldn't be apt to hear any noise, and the only other person who could have discovered her was Mrs Larkin - whom she knew to be detained at the Tower.'

'That tears it,' said Dr Fell. 'That undoubtedly tears it. Hah!' He put his big head in his hands. 'This is bad, Hadley. And what I don't like is the symbolism.'

'Symbolism?'

'I mean those two plaster figures you've described. Suppose you and your lady-love have two china dolls in which you like to fancy an analogy to; yourselves. One of them' is labelled "Abelard" and the other "Heloise." You're very apt to look up Heloise and Abelard, aren't you, and see, who they were? - if you don't already know. And I tell you, Hadley, I didn't like that Bitton woman's much too palpably idiotic prattle about Queen Elizabeth being executed.'

'What are you driving, at?'

'If there is a symbolism about those two figures,' said the doctor, 'we have got to remember two things about Queen Mary Tudor of England and her husband, King Philip II of Spain. One is that all her life Mary was violently in love with Philip, a passion almost as strong as her religious faith; while Philip was never in the least interested in her. And the second thing we must remember is that they called her "Bloody Mary."'

There was a long silence. The little restaurant, almost empty of diners, whispered to that suggestion as with the ticking of a clock.

'Whatever that amounts to,' Hadley said, at length, with ' grim doggedness, 'I'll go on to the second thing that's happened since I've seen you. And it's the really disturbing one. It's about Julius Arbor.'

Dr Fell struck the table. 'Go on!' he said. 'Good God ! I might have known ... '

'He's at Golders Green. They didn't tell us this when we left the Tower, but Sergeant Hamper found it. out and phoned to me, and I've just finished tracing down the rest. When Arbor left us, it couldn't have been much more than twenty past six o'clock. '

'Well, the word had already been carried up to the Middle Tower to let him go through. He told us, you're member, that he'd brought a taxi down there; told the , driver to wait, and then couldn't reappear. After some length of time, the driver wondered what was wrong and came down to the Middle Tower to investigate. The Spur Guard barred his way, and the warder on duty said something about an accident. Apparently the driver had happy visions of his meter clicking into pounds; he planted himself there and waited for over three hours.

'Then Arbor came out from the Byward Tower, where we were, and started to walk along the causeway between there and the Middle Tower: It was dark then, and still rather misty. But there's a gas-lamp on the parapet of the bridge. The taxi-driver and the warder on duty at the Middle Tower happened to glance along the causeway, and saw Arbor leaning against the lamp-standard as though he were about to collapse. Then he straightened up: and stumbled ahead.

'They thought he was drunk. But when he reached them his face was white and sweaty, and he could hardly talk. Another of those attacks we witnessed, undoubtedly, but a worse attack because, somehow, he'd got a worse fright. The taxi-driver took him over to the refreshment-room, and he drank about half a tumbler of brandy neat. He seemed a bit better, and ordered the driver to take him to Sir William's house in Berkeley Square.

'When he arrived there he again told the driver to wait. He said he wanted to pack a bag and then to go to an address at Golders Green. At this the driver protested volubly. He'd been waiting over three hours, there was a big bill on the meter, and he hadn't seen the colour of his fare's money: besides, Golders Green was a; long distance out, Then Arbor shoved-a five-pound note into his hand, and said he could have another if he would do as he was told.

'Naturally, the taxi-driver began to suspect something fishy. During all the time he spent hanging about the Middle Tower, the warder had let slip a few hints about the real state of affairs. Arbor wasn't in the house long before he came out carrying a valise and a couple of coats over his arm. On the drive to Golders Green the driver grew decidedly uneasy.'

Hadley paused, and turned over a sheet of paper from his brief-case as though to refresh his memory.

Did you ever notice how even the most reticent people will speak

freely to taxi-drivers? I don't know why it is, unless it's because a taxi-driver is never surprised at anything. Now, but for what this driver knew of the murder, and Arbor's rather remarkable mumblings in the cab, I shouldn't have heard this at all. But the taxi-driver was afraid he'd be mixed up in a murder. So after he drove

Arbor to Golders Green, he came straight back and went to Scotland Yard. Like most Cockneys, he had a flair for description and vivid pantomime. He perched on the edge of a chair in my office, turning his cap round in his hands and imitating Arbor to the life.

‘First Arbor asked him whether he carried a revolver.

The, taxi-driver said "No!" and laughed, Then Arbor wondered whether they were being followed; he began talking about how he wasn't in the directory at all, and he had a cottage at Golders Green which nobody knew about except some friends near by. But what the driver especially remembered was his constant reference, to a "voice" ‘

'A voice?' Doctor Fell repeated. 'Whose voice?'

'Arbor didn't say. But he asked whether telephone calls could be traced that was the only point he definitely mentioned in connexion with it. Well, they reached the cottage, in an outlying district. But Arbor said he wouldn't go in just at the moment the place hadn't been opened for months. He had the driver drop him at a villa not far away, which was well lighted. The driver noted the name. It was called 'Briarbrae'.'

‘The friends of his, I suppose. H'm.!

'Yes. We looked it up later. It belongs to a Mr Daniel Spengler. What do you make of it?'

'It looks bad, Hadley. This man may be in very grave danger.'

'I don't need you to tell: me that,' the chief inspector said, irritably. 'If the damned fools would only come to us when they get into trouble! But they won't. And if he is in any danger, he took the worst possible course. Instead of going, to a hotel, as he said he intended, he thought he was choosing a spot where nobody could find him. And instead' he picked a place ideally suited for - well, murder:

'What have you done?'

'I sent a man immediately to watch the house, and to phone the

Yard every half-hour. But what danger is he in? Do you think he knows something about the murder, and the murderer knows he knows?'

For a moment Dr Fell puffed furiously at his cigar.

'This is getting much too serious, Hadley. Much. You see, I've been basing everything on a belief that I knew how all this came about. I told you this afternoon that everybody liked playing the master-mind. And I could afford to chuckle, because so much of it is really funny ... '

'Funny'

'Yes. Ironically, impossibly funny. It's like a farce comedy suddenly gone mad. Do you remember Mark Twain's description of his experiences in learning to ride a bicycle? He said he was always doing exactly what he didn't want to do. He tried to keep from running over rocks and being thrown. But if he rode down a street, two hundreds yards wide, and there, happened to be one small piece of brick lying anywhere in the road, inevitably he would run over it. Well, that has a very deadly application to this case.'

'I've got to separate the nonsense and the happenings of pure chance from the really ugly angle of the business. Chance started it, and murder only finished it; that's what I think. I must show you the absurd part of it, and then you can judge whether I'm right. But first there are two things to be done.'

'What?'

'Can you communicate with that man you have on guard at Arbor's cottage?' the doctor asked, abruptly.

'Yes. Through the local police station.'

'Get in touch with him. Tell him, far from keeping in the background, to make himself as conspicuous as possible. But under no circumstances - even if he is hailed to go near Arbor or make himself known to Arbor.'

'What's the purpose of that?'

'I don't believe Arbor's in any danger. But obviously he thinks he is. He also thinks the police haven't any idea where he is. You see, there's something that man knows, which for one reason or another he wouldn't tell us. If he notices your man lurking about his cottage, he'll

jump to the conclusion that it's his enemy. 'If he tries calling the local police, they will find nobody - naturally. It's rather rough on him, but we've got to terrify him into telling what he knows. Sooner or later he'll seek your protection, and by that time we shall be able to get the truth.'

'That,' said the chief inspector, grimly, 'is the only good suggestion you've made so far. I'll do it'

'It can't do any harm. If he is, in danger, the obvious presence of a guard will have a salutary effect on the enemy. If he does call the local police and there's a real enemy about, the police can have a look for the real enemy while they pass up your own man. ... The next thing, we've got to pay a very brief visit to Driscoll's flat.

'If you're thinking something is hidden there, I can tell you that my men will find it more easily than we can ever'

'No. Your men will attach no importance to what I want to find. I don't suppose they bothered to look at his typewriter, did they? Also, I want a brief look about the kitchen. If he has one, as I'm sure he has, we shall probably find it stowed away in the kitchen....'

The mist was clearing as they emerged from the restaurant. The theatre traffic had just begun to thin in the glare of Shaftesbury Avenue, and Hadley had some difficulty in manoeuvring his car. But, once out of the centre of town and across Oxford Street, he accelerated the big Daimler to a fast pace. Bloomsbury lay deserted under high and mournful gaslamps. They cut across into Great Russell Street, and turned left past the long shadows of the British Museum....

Tavistock Square was large and oblong in shape, not too well supplied with street lights. Along the west side the buildings were higher than on the others, and rather more imposing in a heavy. Georgian style. Tavistock Chambers proved to be a red-brick block of flats with four entry halls, two on either side of an arch beneath which a driveway led into the court. Into this court Hadley drove the car.

'So this,' he said, 'is the way the woman escaped. I don't wonder she wasn't noticed.'

He slid from under the wheel and peered about. There was only one lamp in the court, but the mist was rapidly lifting into a clear, cold night.

'Lower parts of the windows frosted glass,' the chief inspector

grunted. 'I left instructions to question the tenants about her, but it's useless. A Red Indian in his war bonnet could have walked out of here without being seen. Let's see.... Those are the glass doors giving on the rear of the entry halls. We want the third- entry. There it is. That'll be Driscoll's flat, with the light in the rear window. Evidently my man hasn't left the place yet.'

He crossed to the glass door, stumbled over a rubbish can, and disturbed a hysterical cat. The others followed him up some steps into a red-tiled hall with brown distempered walls. Its only illumination was a sickly electric bulb in the cage of the automatic lift.' But a thin line of light slanted out from the door on their left, which was not quite closed, and they saw the splintered wood about the lock.

Flat 2. Rampole's eyes moved to the door facing it across the hall, where the watchful Mrs Larkin might be peering out from the flap of the letter-slot.

There was a crash, sudden and violent. The line of light in the doorway of Flat 2 seemed to shake, and the noise echoed hollowly up the lift-well. It had come from that door....

While the echoes were still trembling, Hadley moved swiftly across to the door and pushed it open. Rampole, peering over his shoulder, saw the disorder of Philip Driscoll's sitting-room as it had been described a short time ago,. But there was another piece of disorder now.

In the wall directly opposite was a mantelpiece with an ornate mirror behind the shelf. And in front of this mantel piece, his back to the new-comers, a tall and heavy man stood with his head bowed,. They saw past his shoulder a foolish plaster figurine standing on the mantelshelf; a woman painted in bright colours, with ,a tight-waisted dress and a silver hair-net, But there was no companion figure beside it. The hearthstone was littered with a. thousand white fragments to show where the other figure had been flung down a moment before.

Just for a moment the tableau held - weird and somehow terrible in its power. The echo of that crash seemed to linger; its passion still quivered in the bent back of the man standing there.

Then his hand moved out slowly, and seized the other figure. And as he raised it his head lifted and they saw his face in the mirror.

'Good evening,' said, Dr Fell. 'You're Mr Lester Bitton, aren't you?'

11 The Little Plaster Dolls

NEVER before that time, Rampole afterwards thought, had he ever seen a man's naked face. Never had he seen it as for a brief instant he saw Lester Bitton's face in the mirror. At all times in life there are masks and guards, and in the brain a tiny bell gives warning. But here was a man caught blind in his anguish.

He looked a little like his brother, though his face was inclined to be reddish and have heavy folds. But you could not tell now.

The lost, damned eyes stared back at them from the mirror. His wrist wobbled, and the figure almost slid through his fingers. He took it with his other hand and put it back up on the mantelpiece..

‘Who the hell,’ said Lester Bitton, ‘are you?’

His deep voice was hoarse, and it cracked. That almost finished him, but he fought his nerves. ‘What God damned right have you got to walk in ...’

‘Steady,’ said Hadley, quietly. ‘I’m afraid it’s you who have to make an explanation. This flat has been taken over by the police, you know. And I’m afraid we can’t respect private feelings in a murder case. You are Lester Bitton, aren’t you?’

The man’s heavy breathing quieted somewhat, and the wrath died out of his eyes.

‘I am,’ he said in a lower voice. ‘Who are you?’ ‘My name is Hadley

‘Ah,’ said the other, ‘I see.’ He was groping backwards, and he found the edge of, a heavy leather chair. Slowly he lowered himself until he was sitting on the arm. Then he made, a gesture. ‘Well, here I am.’

‘What are you doing here, Mr Bitton?’

‘I suppose you don’t know?’ Bitton asked, bitterly. He glanced back over his shoulder, at the smashed figure on the hearthstone.

The chief inspector played his advantage. He studied Bitton without threat and almost without interest. Slowly he opened his brief-case, drew out a typewritten sheet - which was only Constable Somers’ report, as Rampole saw - and glanced at it.

‘We know, of course, that you have employed a firm of private

detectives to watch your wife. And - he glanced at the sheet again - 'that one of their operatives,, a Mrs. Larkin, lives directly across the hall from here.'

'Rather smart, you Scotland Yard men," the other observed in an impersonal voice. 'Well, that's right. Nothing illegal in that, I suppose. You also know, then, that I don't need to waste my money any longer.'

'We know that Mr Driscoll is dead.'

Bitton nodded. His heavy, reddish, rather thickly-lined face was assuming normal appearance.

'Yes,' he said, reflectively. 'The swine's dead. I heard it when I went home to dinner. But I'm afraid it hasn't cut my detective agency off from much money. I was intending to pay them off and get rid of them to-morrow. Business conditions being what they are, I couldn't afford an unnecessary expense!'

'That, Mr Bitton, is open to two meanings. Which of them do you imply?'

'Let's be frank, Mr er ... Hadley. I have played the fool. You know I was having my wife followed. I owe her a profound apology. What I have discovered only does credit to her name.'

Hadley's face wore a faint smile.

'Mr Bitton,' he said, 'I had intended having a conversation with you tonight, and this is as good a place as any. I shall have to ask you a number of questions. . .

'As you wish'

Hadley looked round at his companions. Dr Fell was running his eyes over the small, pleasant room, with its dull, brown-papered walls, sporting prints, and leather chairs. One of the chairs had been knocked over. The drawer of a side-table had been thrown, upside down on the floor, its contents scattered. Dr Fell stumped across and peered down.

'Theatre programmes,' he said, 'magazines, old invitations, bills.... H'm. 'Nothing I want here. The desk and the, typewriter will be in the other rooms somewhere. Excuse me. Carry on with the questioning'

He disappeared through a door at the rear.

Hadley removed his bowler, gestured Rampole to a chair, and sat down himself.

'Mr Bitton,' he said, harshly, 'I suggest that you be frank. I am not concerned with your wife's morals, or with yours, except in so far as they concern a particularly brutal murder. You have admitted you had her followed. Why do you trouble to deny that there was an affair between your wife and Philip Driscoll?'

'That's a damned lie. If you insinuate.'

'I don't insinuate. I tell you. You can hardly be very excited by an insinuation which you made, yourself when you put a private detective on her movements can you? Let's not waste time. You have the "Mary" notes, Mr Bitton.'

'Mary? Who the devil is Mary?'

'You should know. You were about to smash her on the hearth when we walked into this room'

Hadley bent forward; he spoke sharply and coldly: 'I warn you again, I can't afford to waste time. You are not in the habit of walking into people's houses and, smashing ornaments off their mantelshelves because you don't approve of the decoration. If you have any idea that we don't know the meaning of those two figures, get rid of it. We do. You had broken the man, and you were about to break the woman. No sane person who saw your face at that moment could, have any doubt of your state of mind.'

Bitton shaded his eyes with a big hand. 'Is it any of your business.' he said at length, 'whether...'

'Have you heard the facts of Driscoll's murder?'

'A few. I spoke to my brother when he returned from the Tower. Laura had come home and locked, herself in her room. When I - when I came back from the City, I knocked at her door and she wouldn't let me in. I thought everybody, had gone mad: Especially as I knew nothing of this murder. And Sheila said that Laura had run into the house as white as death and rushed upstairs without a word. Then Will

came in about seven-thirty and told me a little.... 'Are you aware that an excellent case could be made out against your wife for the murder of Driscoll?'

Hadley was in action now. Rampole stared at him; a placid merchant ship suddenly running out the masked batteries. Hitherto, the American knew, he had lacked proof of his most, vital point, and Bitton had supplied it., He sat grey and inexorable, his fingers interlocked, his eyes burning.

‘Just a moment, Mr Bitton. Don’t say anything. I’ll give you no theories. I simply intend to tell you facts.

‘Your wife was having an affair with Philip Driscoll. She wrote a note telling him to meet her to-day at one-thirty at the Tower of London. We know that he received this note, because it was found in his pocket. The note informed’ him that they were being watched. Driscoll lived off the bounty of a quick-tempered and far from indulgent uncle. I, will not say that if the uncle ever discovered any such scandal he would disinherit his nephew - because even that obvious point is a theory. I will not say that Driscoll saw the vital necessity for breaking off his liaison - because that obvious point is a theory, too.

‘But he did telephone Robert Dalrye to get him out of a mess, just after he received that letter. And, later, someone did speak to Dalrye on the telephone, in a high voice, and lured him away on a wild-goose chase to this flat. You need not consider the following inferences, because they are theories: (i) That Driscoll always ran to Dalrye when he was in trouble, 2)That all Driscoll’s family knew this, (3) That Dalrye’s level-headedness would have caused the impressionable Driscoll to break off such a dangerous entanglement, (4) That Driscoll was in a mood to break it off, because he had not seen his paramour for several weeks and he was a youth of roving fancy, (5) That this paramour felt convinced she could keep him in line if she saw him once again alone, without the interference of a cool-headed third party, (6) That Driscoll’s paramour knew of this morning telephone call through Sheila Bitton, who had also spoken with Dalrye on the phone that morning, (7) That the voice of Driscoll’s paramour is, for a woman, fairly deep, and, finally (8) That a voice on the telephone speaking quickly, chaotically, and almost unintelligibly, can pass without detection for the tones of almost anyone the speaker may choose.’

Hadley was quite unemotional. He spaced his words as though he were reading a document, and his interlocked fingers seemed to beat time to them.

‘I have told you these were inferences. Now for more facts,’ the chief

inspector continued.. `The appointment in the note had been for one-thirty. One-thirty is the last time Driscoll was seen alive. He was standing near the Traitors' Gate, and some person approached out of the shadows and touched his arm. At precisely twenty-five minutes to two, a woman answering to the description of your wife was seen hurrying away from the vicinity of the Traitors' Gate. She was hurrying so blindly, in fact, that she bumped squarely into the witness who saw her in a roadway no wider than this room. Finally, when Driscoll's body was found on the steps of the Traitors' Gate, he was discovered to have been stabbed with a weapon which your wife purchased last year in southern France, and which was ready to her hand in her own home.

`Can't you imagine what a clever lawyer could do with all those points, Mr Bitton? And I am only a policeman.'

Bitton hoisted up his big body. His hands were shaking and the rims of his eyes were red.

`Damn you,' he said, `that's what you think, is it? I'm glad you didn't make an unutterable ass of yourself before you told me how good your case was, and arrested her. I'm going to blow your whole case higher than hell without stepping any further than that flat across the hall. Because I have a witness who saw her the whole time she was at the Tower of London, and can swear Driscoll was alive after she left him.'

Hadley was on his feet in an instant.

`Yes,' he said, in a louder voice, `I rather thought you had. I rather thought that was why you came to Tavistock Chambers tonight. When you heard about the murder, you couldn't wait for the usual report of your private detective over there. You had to go to her.... If she knows anything, bring her over here and let her swear to it. Otherwise, so help me God ! I'll swear out a warrant for Mrs Bitton's arrest.'

Bitton shouldered out of the chair. He was fighting mad, and his usual good sense had deserted him. He flung open the, door with the broken lock, and closed it with a slam.

Rampole drew a hand across his forehead. His throat was dry and his heart hammering.

`I didn't know,' he said - `I didn't know you were so certain Mrs Bitton. had . . . '

There was a placid smile under Hadley's clipped moustache. He sat

down again and folded his hands.

‘S’h-h!’ he warned. ‘Not so loud, please; he’ll hear you. How did I do it? I’m not much of an actor, but I’m used to little demonstrations like that.’

He caught the expression on the American’s face.

‘Go ahead, my, boy. Swear. I don’t mind. It’s a tribute to my performance.’

‘Then you don’t believe--,’

‘I never believed it for an instant,’ the chief inspector admitted, cheerfully. ‘There were too many holes in it. If Mrs Bitton killed Driscoll, what about the hat on Driscoll’s head? That becomes, nonsense. If she killed him by Traitors’ Gate with a blow straight through the heart at one-thirty, how did he contrive to keep alive until ten minutes to two? - Why didn’t she leave the Tower after she had killed him, instead of hanging about unnecessarily for nearly an hour and getting herself drawn into the mess without reason? ... Besides, my explanation of the faked telephone call to Dalrye was very thin. If Bitton hadn’t been so upset he would have seen it. Dalrye, of course, never talked to Sheila, Bitton this morning and told her Driscoll had made an appointment. But I had to hit Bitton hard while his guard was down.’

Rampole stared across at the smashed plaster on the hearthstone. ‘You had to do that. Otherwise you’d never have got Mrs Larkin’s testimony. If she followed Mrs Bitton, she knows all Mrs Bitton’s movements, but ... ’

‘Exactly. But she would never tell them to the police. This afternoon she swore to us she had seen nothing. That was a part of her job; she took the risk. She couldn’t tell us she was following Mrs Bitton; without exposing the whole thing and losing her position. More than that - and a much sounder reason - I think she has tidy blackmail schemes in her mind. Now we’ve knocked that on the head!’. She’s already told Bitton, of course. So if she won’t tell, he will to clear his wife.’

Rampole pushed back his hat.

‘Neat!’ he said. ‘Very neat, sir. Now, if your plan to persuade Arbor to talk works as well...’

'Arbor...." The chief inspector sprang up. 'I've been sitting here explaining my own cleverness, and I clean forgot that. I've got to telephone Golders Green, and do it quickly. Where' the devil is the phone? And, incidentally, where's the man who was supposed to be guarding this flat; how did Bitton get in here, anyhow? And where, by the way, is Fell?'

He was answered without delay. From beyond the closed door, somewhere in the interior of the flat, there was a scrape, a thud, and a terrific metallic crash.

'It's all right!' a muffled voice boomed out to them from some distance away, 'No more plaster figures broken. I've just dropped a basket of tools.'

Hadley and Rampole hurried in the direction of the voice. Beyond the door through which the doctor had gone, a narrow passage ran straight back. There were two doors in either wall; those on the left leading to a study and a bedroom, and those on the right to a bath and a dining-room. The kitchen was at the extreme rear of the passage.

To add to the confusion of the room, Driscoll had never been especially neat in his habits. The study had been cluttered up long before the woman's frantic search that afternoon. The floor was a drift of papers; rows of shelves gaped where whole sections of books had been' tossed out; and the drawers of the desk hung out empty and drunken. A portable typewriter, its cover off, had become entangled with the telephone, and the contents of several brass ash-trays were sprayed across some carbon paper and pencils.

Hadley glanced quickly into the other rooms as Dr Fell opened the door of the kitchen.' The bed was still unmade in the bedroom. The search here had been more perfunctory, confined to the bureau. And the dining-room had not been touched at all. It had seldom or never been used for eating purposes, but there had palpably been a use for it. Two gigantic rows of empty soda-siphons had been lined up on the sideboard. Under a mosaic dome of lights over the table there mingled in confusion empty bottles, unwashed glasses, a cocktail-shaker and ash-tray.

'The kitchen also,' Dr Fell observed at his elbow, 'seems to have been used chiefly for mixing drinks' He swept his arm about. 'You see? That sitting-room he kept tidy for casual visitors like his uncle. This is where he really lived. H'mf.'

He was wheezing in the kitchen doorway. Over his arm he carried a large market-basket which jingled with iron.

'You said tools?' inquired Hadley,, sharply. 'Was that what you were looking for? You mean a chisel or a screwdriver used to force open the outer door of this flat?'

'Good Lord, no!' snorted the doctor. 'You don't suppose the woman got into the flat, came back here, found a chisel, and went out, again so that she could break open the door for sheer amusement, do you?'

'She might have done just that,' said the inspector, quietly, 'to give the impression it was some outsider who had burgled the flat.'

'It's entirely possible, I grant you. But, as a matter of fact, I wasn't interested in the breaking or entering. It was an entirely different sort of tool I was looking for.'

'It may further interest you to know,' the chief inspector pursued, rather irritably, 'that while you have been poking about in the kitchen we've learned a great deal from Bitton....'

The doctor nodded several times, and the black ribbon on his glasses swung jumpily.

'Yes,' he agreed, 'I thought you would. He was here to get information from his private detective, and you've scared him into forcing, her to tell what she knows by making out a thundering case against his wife. I imagined

I could safely leave that to you. But from my point of view it wasn't necessary. I'm rather sure I can tell you what the Larkin woman knows, Come over here to the study for a moment, and have a look at Driscoll's character.'

"You infernal old stuffed-shirt bluffer ...!" said Hadley, like one who commences an oration.

'Oh, come,' protested the doctor, with a mildly injured air. 'Tut, tut! No. I may be a childish old fool. I admit that. But I'm not a bluffer, old man. Really, I'm not. Let's see, what was I talking about? Oh yes; Driscoll's character. There are some rather interesting photographs of him in the study,'

Sharply and stridently through the silent passage the telephone in the study rang.

‘THAT;’ said Hadley, whirling about, ‘may be a lead. Wait a moment. I’ll answer it.’

They followed him into the study.

He said: ‘Hello! ... Yes, this is.... Chief Inspector Hadley speaking. ... Who? ... Oh yes .. It’s Sheila Bitton,’ he said to, the others over his shoulder, and there was a tinge of disappointment in his voice. ‘Yes.... Yes, certainly, Miss Bitton.’ A long pause. ‘Why, I suppose you may, but I shall have to have a look at everything first, you know. No trouble at all! When will you come over?’

‘Wait!’ said Dr Fell, eagerly. He stumped across. ‘She’s coming over here to-night?’

‘Yes. She says there are some belongings of Philip’s that her uncle wants her to bring to the house.’

‘H’m. Ask her if she’s got anybody to bring her over here.’

‘What the devil ... ! Oh, all right,’ Hadley agreed, then spoke again. ‘She says she’s got Dalrye,’ he transmitted after a moment.

‘That won’t do. There’s somebody in that house I’ve got to talk to, and I’ve got to talk to him out of the house or it may be no good. Let me talk to her, will you?’

Hadley shrugged and got up from the desk.

‘Hello!’ said the doctor. ‘Miss Bitton? This is Dr Fell, Mr Hadley’s colleague. You do? Oh yes; from your fiance.

HEY?’

‘You needn’t blow the mouthpiece out,’ Hadley observed, sourly. ‘What tact! What tact! Ha!’

‘Excuse me, Miss Bitton. I may be, of course, the fattest walrus Mr Dalrye has ever seen, but ... No, my dear, of course I don’t mind....’

they could hear the phone tinkling in an animated fashion ; Rampole remembered Mrs Larkin’s description of Sheila Bitton as a ‘little blonde,’ and grinned to himself. Dr Fell contemplated the phone with an expression of one trying to smile in order to have his picture taken, presently he broke in.

'What I was trying to say, Miss Bitton, was this. You'll undoubtedly have a number of things to take away, and they'll be quite bulky.... Oh! Mr Dalrye has to be back at the Tower by ten o'clock? Then you will certainly want somebody to handle them. Haven't you somebody there who could? ... The chauffeur's not there? Well, what about your father's valet? What's his name? - Marks. He spoke highly of Marks, and ... But please don't bring your father, Miss Bitton; it would only make him feel worse. Oh, he's lying down? Very well, Miss Bitton. We shall expect you. Good-bye.'

He turned about, glowering, and shook the tool-basket until it jangled. 'She bubbles. She prattles. And she called me a walrus. A most naive young; lady. And if any humorist on these premises makes the obvious remark about the Walrus and the Carpenter ...'

'Dr Watson ...' Hadley muttered. 'Thanks for reminding me. I've got to put a call through to the police station at Golders Green. Get up from there.'

He began a series of relay-calls through Scotland Yard, and finally left his orders. He had just finished informing some mystified desk sergeant on the other wire to phone him here after he had made sure the message was delivered to the guard at Arbor's cottage, when they heard footsteps in the sitting-room.

Evidently it had taken some time for Lester Bitton to persuade Mrs Larkin that it would be advisable to talk. Bitton was pacing the front room, looking flushed and dangerous. Mrs Larkin was holding back the curtain of the front window and peering out with extreme nonchalance. When she saw Hadley she examined him coldly.

'You tecs,' she said, her upper lip wrinkling; 'pretty damn smart, ain't you? I told his nibs here you'd got nothing on his wife. He should have sat tight, and let you go ahead, and then we could both have got a sweet piece of change out of you for false arrest. But no. He had to get scared and spill the beans.'

Hadley opened his brief-case again. This time he was not bluffing; the printed form he opened carried two decidedly unflattering snapshots.

"Amanda Georgette Larkin", he read. "Alias Amanda Leeds, Alias Georgie Simpson. Known as 'Emmy' Shoplifting. Speciality, jewellery, large department stores. Last heard of in New York ...

'You needn't go through all that,' interrupted Emmy. 'There's

nothing on me now. I told you that this afternoon. But, go on and get his nibs to tell you what agency I work for. Then you'll tell them, and, bingo! I'm through.'

Hadley folded up the paper and replaced it. 'If you give us a clear statement, I don't think I need warn your employers about Georgie Simpson.'

She put her hands on her hips and studied him.

'All right. Here she goes.'

Mrs Larkin's manner underwent a subtle change. That afternoon she had seemed all tight corsets and severe tailoring, like an especially forbidding schoolmistress. Now the stiffness disappeared into an easier slouch and she dropped into a chair.

'What we want to know is everything you did to-day, Mrs Larkin,' Hadley told her.

'Well, in my profession a man we always look for is the postman. I was up early, ready for him. He always puts the letters in the box of Number 1, my place, first, and then goes across the way. I can time it so that I'm picking up the milk bottle outside my door when he gets out the mail for Number 2. And that was easy. Because X19 - that's the way we have to describe people in the confidential reports - X19 always wrote her letters on a sort of pink-purplish kind of paper you could see a mile off.'

'How did you know,' inquired Hadley, 'that the letters were from X19 ?'

She looked at him. 'Don't be funny,' said Mrs Larkin, coldly. 'It's not healthy, for a respectable widow to get into people's flats with a duplicate key. And it's a damn sight less healthy to be found steaming open people's letters. Let's say I overheard them talking about the first letter she wrote him.'

'All right. I'd been warned X19 was coming back to London Sunday night, and so I had my eyes open this morning. I was kind of surprised when I went out to pick up my milk bottle and found Driscoll picking up his milk bottle just over the way. He never gets up before noon. He had his door open, and I could see the inside of the letter-box.'

'He stuck his hand in the letter-box, pulled out the pink letter, and sort of grunted, and put it in his pocket without opening it. Then he

saw me, and let the door slam.

'So I thought, "What ho!" And I knew there was going to be a meeting somewhere. But I wasn't to watch him. I'd only been planted opposite so I could catch X19 with the goods.'

'You have been a long time in doing it,' said Hadley.

She made a comfortable gesture. 'No use finishin' off a good assignment too quick.... But all the times she's been there I never saw anything. The best chance I had was the night before she went away, about two weeks ago. They come in from the theatre or some place, and they was both pretty tight. I watched the door, and everything was all quiet for about two hours, so I knew what was up. Then, the door opened, and they both come out again for him to take her home. And they stood there swearing eternal love to each other and he was saying how he was going to do a piece of work that would get him a good newspaper job, and then they could get married... .

'But I wasn't certain,' explained they practical Mrs Larkin, kin, 'because that's what they all say when they're drunk. And besides, I heard him telling the same thing to a little red-head he had here while X19 was away. But that night, of course, I wasn't on duty. I was just getting home myself, and he came staggering down the steps with his arm around the red-head, and she was trying to hold him up ... '

'Stop it!' Lester Bitton suddenly shouted. 'You didn't,' he said heavily - 'you didn't put into your report you didn't say this'

'Time enough. But I am off the subject, ain't I?' said Mrs Larkin. She straightened the puffs of hair over her ears. 'Don't take it so hard, mister. They're all like that, mostly. I didn't mean to give you the works.

'I'll go on about to-day. Oh yes; I know where I was. Well, I got dressed and went up to Berkeley Square. It's a good thing I did, because she come out of the house fairly early. And believe it or not, that woman walked all the way from her place to the Tower of London!

'Well, I seen her buying tickets for all them towers, and I had to buy 'em all, too, because I didn't know where she'd , go. But I thought, this is a hell of a place to pick for rendy-voo, and then I tumbled to it. She was wise to being watched. I thought probably that trip to the country tipped her off, and her husband had maybe said something to let her guess....'

‘They had never gone there together before?’ interrupted Hadley.

‘Not while I was watching them’

She was more subdued now when she spoke, and she told her story without comment. It was ten-minutes past one when Laura Bitton arrived. After buying her tickets and a little guide, she, had gone into the refreshment-room and ordered a sandwich and a glass of milk. All the time she ate she watched the clock with every sign of nervousness and impatience. ‘And, what’s more,’ Mrs Larkin explained, ‘she wasn’t carrying that arrow-thing you had on your desk this afternoon.’

At twenty minutes past one Laura: Bitton left the refreshment-room and hurried away. At the Middle Tower she hesitated, looked about, and presently moved along the causeway, and hesitated again at the Byward Tower. There she consulted the map in her guide-book and looked carefully about her.

‘I could see what was in her mind, Mrs Larkin told them. ‘She didn’t want to hang around the door, like a tart or something; but she wanted to be sure she saw him when he got there. But it was dead easy - Anybody who came in would’ve had to walk straight along that road - up towards the Traitors’ Gate place and the Bloody Tower. So she walked along the road, slow, looking all around. Then when she got near the Traitors’ Gate place she turned to the right and stopped again,...’

So that, Rampole reflected was what Philip Driscoll saw when he kept looking out of the window in the general’s quarters, as Parker had described. He saw the, woman waiting for him down in Water Lane. And soon afterwards he said he would take a stroll in the grounds, and hurried out.

‘She’d moved back,’ Mrs Larkin went on, ‘in a doorway on the right-hand side of the Traitors’ Gate. I’d flattened myself against the same wall, a little distance back. Then I saw a little guy in plus-fours come out from under; the arch of the Bloody, Tower. He didn’t see er - X19 because she was back in the door; I thought it was Driscoll, but I wasn’t sure. Neither was she, I guess, for a minute, because she’d expected him to come the other way. Then he starts to walk back and forth, and next he goes over to the rail. I heard him use a cuss-word, and there was a sound like a match striking.

‘Now, here’s the joker in the deck. I don’t know whether you noticed. But that archway thing, where all them spikes in the gate are,

sticks out about seven or eight feet on either side of the rail. If you're in that roadway, and looking down it in a straight line, you can't see the rail in front of the steps at all. For the time being it was fine for me, because I could get within a couple of feet of them without being seen.

'So X19 knew it was Driscoll all right. She slipped out of the door and turned the corner towards the rail. The first thing he said was, "Laura, for God's sake what did you want to bring, me down here for? I've got friends here. Is it true that he's found out?" What she said at first was something about that was the reason why she had said to come here, because if either of 'em was seen they could be calling on people they knew. Then he said that was a crazy idea, and was it, true that he'd found out; he asked that again. She said yes. And she said, "Do you love me?" And he said, "Yes, yes, but I'm in a frightful mess." They was both pretty upset and got to talking louder. He said something about his uncle, and all of a sudden he stopped and said, "Oh, my God!"'

'She asked him what was the matter. Here's what he said. "Laura, there's something I've got to do here or I'm ruined." 'His voice was shaking. It sounded bad. He said, "Don't stay with me. We might be seen. Go in and look at the, Crown jewels, and then walk up to the parade ground. I'll join you there inside five minutes."

'I heard her walk up and down; for a second or two, then she whirled around and started, towards the Bloody Tower, and I followed. I didn't see him; I suppose he'd gone on ahead. That was about twenty-minutes to two.'

Hadley leaned forward. 'You say you, followed?' he demanded. 'Did you see her bump into anybody?'

'Bump into anybody?' she repeated, blinking. 'No. But then I mightn't have. I slipped inside that big arch of the Bloody Tower and up against the wall, in case she turned back. I have a kind of idea that some man passed me; but it was foggy, and under that arch darker than hell...'

'I heard her speak to one of them birds in the funny hats and say, "Which way to the Crown jewels?" and he directed her to a door not very far on the other side of the arch, and I was still there. - That's all. He didn't come near her, because somebody killed him just after he'd left her. But I know she didn't, because I took a look in that place there to keep quiet. It's money well earned. But don't try to earn any

more. That's blackmail, you know.'

'Oh, that's all right,' Mrs Larkin agreed, patting the puffs of hair over her ears. 'If you birds are on the level with me, I'm on the level with you'... Well, I'm off to the pub. G'night. See you at the inquest'

When she had gone the rest of them sat silent. Dr Fell was wheezing sleepily. And again Hadley began to pace about.

'So that's settled, he said. 'I think we can take Mrs Bitton off the list of suspects. I doubt if Larkin's lying. Her information is too exactly in line with all the other facts she couldn't possibly have known. Now what?'

'What do you suggest?'

'It all rests on what it was Driscoll remembered he'd forgotten to do when he spoke to Mrs Bitton in front of the Traitors' Gate. He started for somewhere, but he didn't get very far away, and then he ran into somebody.... the murderer.'

'Fair enough,' grunted the doctor.

'Now, first, there's the direction he, might have gone.' Larkin didn't see him go. But we know he didn't go along Water Lane towards the Byward or Middle Tower; towards the gate, in other words. Because Larkin was standing there, and she would have seen him pass.

'There are only two other directions he could have gone. He could have gone straight, along Water Lane in the other direction. The only place he could have gone in that direction is towards another arch, similar to the Bloody Tower and a hundred feet or so away in the same wall the inner ballium wall. From that arch a path leads up to the White Tower, which is almost in the centre of the whole enclosure. Now, unless all our calculations are wrong, and there's some piece of evidence we haven't heard, why on earth should he be going to the White Tower? Or, for that matter, to the main guard, the store, the hospital, or any place he could have reached by going through the arch?

'Besides, he hadn't got very far away from the Traitors' Gate before he met the murderer. Traitors' Gate is an ideal place for murder on a foggy day. But if Driscoll had been starting for the White Tower and met the murderer quite some distance from Traitors' Gate, it wouldn't have been very practical for the murderer to drive that steel bolt through him, pick him up, carry him back, and pitch him over the rail.

The risk of being seen carrying that burden any distance, even in the fog, would have been too great.'

Hadley paused in his pacing before the mantelpiece.,

'On the other hand, the murderer couldn't say, "Look here, old man, let's stroll back to the Traitors' Gate I want to talk to you." Naturally Driscoll would have said "What's the matter with telling me here?" No, it won't do. Driscoll had no business in that direction, anyway. So - there's only one alternative.'

Dr Fell took out a cigar.

'Namely,' he inquired, 'that Driscoll went in the same direction as Mrs Bitton did through the arch of the Bloody Tower?'

'Yes. All indications show that. For instance, what Larkin said. She heard Driscoll walk away, and then Mrs Bitton walked up and down in front of the rail a minute or so ... to give Driscoll time to go on up there ahead o f her. Driscoll said they mustn't be seen together. Once you get, inside the inner ballium wall, as Larkin said, you're in view of pretty well everybody; especially as it's high ground, and the fog is thin. Larkin had a positive impression that he'd gone on ahead of Mrs Bitton. And that's the reasonable direction for him to have gone, because ... '

'Because it's the way to the King's House,' supplied Dr Fell.

‘Hadley nodded. ‘Whatever he had forgotten,, and went to do, was in the general's quarters at the King's House. That's the only part of the Tower he ever had any business in... . There was somebody he had to speak with on the phone, or some message he had to give Parker. But he never got there.’

‘Good work,’ said the doctor, approvingly. ‘By, degrees everything seems to centre round the arch under the Bloody Tower; - Hence we perceive the following points: The arch under this tower is a broad tunnel about twenty feet long,’ and the road runs on a steep uphill slant. At the best of times it is rather dark, but on a foggy day it is as black as hell. Why, then, didn't the murderer dump him against the wall and leave him there?’

‘Because the body would be discovered too soon. There's too much traffic in that place. So the murderer picked Driscoll up like a ventriloquist's dummy, took a quick look to each side in Water Lane, walked across, and chucked him over the rail on the steps.’

The doctor nodded. He held up one hand and indicated points on his fingers.

‘Driscoll walks into the tunnel, then, and meets the murderer. Mrs Bitton waits a short time, and follows, because she doesn't know Driscoll is still in the tunnel. Now do you see what we've got, Hadley? We've got Mrs Bitton at one end of the tunnel, Driscoll and the murderer in the middle

and our good friend Mr Arbor at the other end. Haven't we?’

‘Every time you begin to elucidate,’ said the chief inspector, ‘the thing gets more tangled up. But that seems clear. Larkin said Mrs Bitton went into the arch at twenty-five minutes to two. Arbor bumped; into her on the other side of it at a coinciding time. Where's the catch?’

‘I didn't say there was a catch. Now, following Mrs Bitton at a little distance is the eagle-eyed Larkin, who enters the tunnel next. All this time you must assume the murderer was still in the tunnel with his victim; otherwise she would have seen him carry the body out. In the tunnel it's very dark and foggy. Mrs Larkin hears somebody moving. That is probably Arbor on his way out from the other side. Thus the tunnel is cleared of traffic. The murderer, who has been crouching there with his victim in a deadly sweat for fear he'll be discovered, carries out the body, throws it over the rail, and escapes. , That, I take

it, is the summary of events?"

"Yes. That's about it'

Dr Fell squinted down his cigar. "Then," he said, "where does the enigmatic Mr Arbor fit in? What terrified him?"

Hadley slapped the arm of a chair with his brief-case. "He was passing through that dark tunnel, Fell ... and when he was in such a bad state after he left us, the taxidriver said he kept repeating over and over something about a "voice"..."

"Tut, tut," said the doctor. "Do you think the murderer leaned out and said "Boo!" to him as he passed?"

"I don't expect much from you. But," the chief inspector said bitterly, "a trifle less heavy humour...."

But he was not paying a great deal of attention to what Dr Fell said, Rampole noticed.; His eye kept straying to the mantelpiece, to the smashed figure on the hearthstone, and up again to the other image on the shelf. The doctor followed his glance.

"Let me tell you what you're thinking, Hadley," he observed. "You're thinking: Murderer. Big man; strength. Powerful motive. Man capable of murder, from the emotional depths we saw ourselves. Man with access to crossbow bolt. Man who certainly knew about crossbow bolt. Man so far not even questioned about whereabouts at time of murder, Lester Bitton."

"Yes," said Hadley, "I was thinking just that."

At the door of the flat the bell-buzzer rang. But before Rampole had time to reach the door, it was pushed open ... ,

"I'm so sorry we're fearfully late!" a girl's voice said, promptly, before, the owner saw anybody. "But it was the chauffeur's night off, and we didn't want to take the big car, and we tried to use the other car, and it got half-way out into the street and stopped. And so we had to use the big car, after all."

Rampole found himself looking down at a small- face which was poked round the edge of the door. Then by degrees the new-comer' got into the room. She was a plump, very pretty little blonde, with two of the most beaming and expressive blue eyes the American had ever seen; she looked like a breathless doll.

‘Er ... Miss Bitton?’ inquired Rampole.

‘I’m Miss Bitton,’ she explained, as though she were singling herself out of a group.

Dalrye, thin and blinking, towered over her in the doorway. His sandy hair was disarranged under a hat stuck on the side of his head, and there was a smear of grease under one eye.

Sheila Bitton’s large eyes wandered about the room. A shocked look came into them when she saw the broken plaster image.

She looked at Rampole. ‘You’re not ... ooh no ! I know - you. You’re the one who looks like a football-player. Bob described all of you to me. And you’re much better looking than I thought you’d be from what he said,’ she decided, subjecting him to a peculiarly open and embarrassing scrutiny.

‘And I, ma’am,’ said Dr Fell, ‘am the walrus, you see. Mr Dalrye seems to have a flair for vivid description. In what delicate terms, may I ask, did he paint a word-picture of my friend Hadley, here?’

‘H’m?’ inquired Miss Bitton, arching her brows. She glanced at the doctor, and an expression of delight again animated her sparkling eyes. ‘Oh, I say! You are a dear!’ she cried

Dr Fell jumped violently. There were no inhibitions whatever about Sheila Bitton.

‘About Mr Hadley?’ she inquired, candidly. ‘Oh, Bob said he didn’t look like anything in particular.’

Dalrye spread out his hands behind her back in helpless pantomime to the others.

‘and I’ve always wanted to meet the police, but the only kind I ever meet are the kind who ask me why I am driving down streets where the arrows point the other way; and why not? because there’s no traffic coming and I can go ever so much faster.’ And Then she remembered again why she was here, and stopped with a jerk; the rest of them were afraid there would, be sudden tears.

‘Of course, Miss Bitton,’ the chief inspector said, hastily. ‘Now if you’ll just sit down a moment and get your breath, then I’m sure.’

‘Excuse me,’ said Dalrye. ‘I’m going to wash my hands.’ Hee

shivered a little, shut his jaws hard and left the room. Miss Bitton said, 'Poor Phil' suddenly, and sat down.

There was a silence.

'You..... somebody,' she remarked in a small voice, 'somebody's tipped over that pretty little figure on the mantel. I'm sorry, It was one of the things I wanted to take back with me.'

'Had you seen, it before?' asked Hadley. His discomfort had disappeared as he saw a possible lead.

'Why, of course. I was there when they got them.'

'When who got them?'

'At the fair. Phil and Laura and Uncle Lester and I all went to it. Uncle Lester said it was all silly, and didn't want to go, but, Laura used that sort of pitying way she has and he said, "All right, he'd go. He wouldn't ride on any of the swings or giddy-go-rounds or things, though."

'Phil started ragging Uncle Lester, and Uncle Lester got sort of red in the face, but he didn't say anything and then we got to a shooting-gallery where they have the rifles and things, and Uncle Lester spoke up sort of sharp, but not very loud, and said this was a man's game, and not for children, and did Phil want to try? And Phil did, but he wasn't very good. And then Uncle Lester just picked up a pistol instead of a rifle and shot off a whole row of pipes clear across the gallery so fast you couldn't count them; and then he put down the pistol and walked away without saying anything. So Phil didn't like that ... I could see he didn't. And every booth we passed he began challenging Uncle Lester to all kinds of games, and Laura joined in too.'

'But about the dolls, Miss Bitton?' Hadley asked.

'Oh yes. It was Laura who won them ; they're a pair. It was at throwing darts, and she was ever so good. And, you got prizes for it, and Laura got the highest prize for her score, and she said, "Look, Philip and Mary," and laughed. Because that's what the dolls have written on them, and, you see, Laura's middle name is Mary. Then Uncle Lester said he wouldn't have her keeping that trash; it was disgraceful-looking and of course I wanted them ever so badly. But Laura said no, she'd give them to Philip if Mary couldn't have them. And Phil did the meanest thing I ever knew, because he made the absurdest bow and said he would keep them.'

‘All the way back I kept teasing Phil to give them to me; and he made all sorts of ridiculous speeches that didn’t mean anything, and looked at Laura, but he wouldn’t give them to me. And that’s how I remember them, because they remind me of Phil. ... You see, I even asked Bob to, see if he could get Phil to give them to me; I asked him the next day .. that was ages ago ... when I called Bob on the telephone, because I always make him ring me up every day, or else I ring him up.’

She paused, her thin eyebrows raised again as she saw Hadley’s face.

‘You say,’ the chief inspector observed, in a voice he tried to make’ casual, ‘that you talk every day to Mr Dalrye on the telephone?’

Rampole started. He remembered now. Earlier in the evening Hadley had made a wild shot when he was building up a fake case against Laura Bitton in front of her husband. He had said that Dalrye had informed Sheila of Driscoll’s proposed visit to the Tower at one o’clock, because Dalrye talked to her on the telephone that morning; and that, therefore anybody in the Bitton house could have known of the one-o’clock engagement. Hadley, thought it was a wild shot, and nothing more. But, Rampole remembered, Lester Bitton had shown no disposition to doubt it.

Sheila Bitton’s blue eyes were fixed on Hadley.

‘Oh, please!’ she said, ‘don’t you preach! You sound like Daddy. He tells me what a fool I am, calling up every day, and I don’t think he likes Bob, anyway, because Bob hasn’t any money.’

‘My, dear Miss Bitton,’ Hadley interposed, with a sort of desperate joviality, ‘I certainly am not preaching. I think it’s a splendid idea.’

‘You’re a dear!’ cooed Miss Bitton. ‘And they rag me so about it, and even Phil used to phone me and pretend he was Bob and ask me to go to the police station because Bob had been arrested for flirting with women in Hyde Park, and was in gaol, and would I bail him out, and ’

‘Ha, ha,’ said Hadley. ‘But what I wanted to ask you, did you speak to Mr Dalrye to-day?’

‘Yes, I- did talk to him to-day.’

‘When, Miss Bitton? In the morning?’

‘Yes. That’s when I usually call, you know, because then General

Mason isn't there.'

‘But, ‘Miss Bitton, when you spoke to Mr Dalrye this morning did he tell you that Philip Driscoll ... your cousin, you know ... was coming to see him at the Tower?’

‘Yes,’ she said, after a pause. ‘I know, because Bob wanted to know what sort of mess Phil had got into now, and did I know anything about it? He told me not to say anything about it to the others’

‘And you didn’t?’

‘I sort of hinted, that’s all, at the breakfast table. I asked them if they knew why Phil was going to the Tower of London at one o’clock, and they didn’t know, and of course I obeyed Bob and didn’t say anything more....’

‘I fancy that should be sufficient,’ said Hadley. ‘Was any comment made?’

‘Comment?’ the girl repeated, doubtfully. ‘N - no; they just talked a bit, and joked.’

‘Who was at the table?’

‘Just Daddy, and Uncle Lester and that horrible man who’s been stopping with us; the one who rushed out this afternoon without saying a word to anybody.’

‘Was Mrs Bitton at the table?’

‘Laura? Oh! Oh no. She, didn’t come down. She wasn’t feeling well, and, anyway, I don’t blame her, because she and Uncle Lester must have been up all last night, talking; I heard them, and . . .’

‘But surely Miss. Bitton, something must have been said at the breakfast table?’

‘No, Mr Hadley. Truly. Of course I don’t like being at the table when just Daddy and that horrible Mr Arbor are there, because mostly I can’t understand what they’re talking about, books and things like that, and jokes I don’t think funny. Or else the talk gets horrid, like the night when Phil told Uncle Lester he wanted to die in a top-hat. But I there wasn’t anything important that I heard. Of course, Uncle Lester did say he was going to see Phil to-day.... But there wasn’t anything important. Really.’

4 To Die in a Top-Hat

HADLEY made a convulsive movement in his seat. Then he got out a handkerchief and mopped his forehead.

'Ha, ha,' he said, automatically. 'You never hear anything important, Miss Bitton. It's most unfortunate. Now, Miss Bitton, please try to grasp the fact that some of the meaningless, unimportant conversations you overheard may be of the utmost importance. Miss Bitton, just how much do you know about your cousin's death?'

'Nothing, much, Mr Hadley,' she said, fretfully. 'They won't tell me. I couldn't get a word out of Laura or Daddy, and Bob just said there was a sort of accident and he was killed by this man who steals all the hats but that's the only...'

She broke off short as Dalrye came back into the room again. He looked more presentable now.

'Sheila,' he said, 'whatever the things you want happen to be, you'd better go and pick 'em out. That place gives me the horrors. Everywhere I look Phil seems to be sitting there.'

'I'm not afraid,' the girl announced, sticking out her under-lip. 'I don't believe in ghosts. You've been so long in that musty old Tower of London ...'

'Tower!' Dalrye exclaimed, suddenly rumpling his sandy hair. 'Lord! I forgot.' He dragged out his watch. 'Whoof! A quarter to eleven. I've been locked out three-quarters of an hour. My dear, your father will have to put up with me in the house for tonight. I'm dashed if I stay here.'

His eye wandered over to a leather couch against one wall, and he shuddered again. Hadley said:

'Now, if you please, Miss Bitton, let's go on. First tell us about this extraordinary business of your cousin wanting to die in a top-hat.'

'Eh?' said Dalrye. 'Good God! what's this?'

'Why, Robert Dalrye,' Sheila Bitton said, warmly, 'you know, perfectly well.... Oh no, you don't. I remember now, when you spoke about getting back too that hateful Tower. You had to leave the table early to get there. It was the first night that Mr Arbor ... no, it wasn't, because Uncle Lester wasn't there then. Anyway, it was some night.'

Just Daddy and Uncle Lester and Laura and I were at the table; and Philip, of course. It was the night before Laura and Uncle Lester went to Cornwall. And Philip was taking Laura to the theatre, because at the last minute Uncle Lester had business and couldn't go, you see; but they were taking the trip to Cornwall because Uncle Lester had lost a lot of money or something, and he was all run down.

‘It was a sort of spooky night, you see, with rain and hail coming down. Anyway, we started talking about death. And Uncle Lester asked Daddy how he'd choose to die if he had to die. Daddy said he supposed he'd choose to die like some duke or other who said he wanted to be drowned in a barrel of wine ... fancy! But then they got serious about it, the way people do, and I was getting scared because they didn't talk very loud, and it was storming outside.

‘And finally Daddy said he thought he'd choose some kind of poison he talked about that kills you in one whiff when you breathe it, and Uncle Lester said he thought a bullet through the head would be best, and Laura kept saying, “What rot, what rot,” and “Come on, Phil, or we'll be late for the first-act curtain.” And when Phil got up from the table Uncle Lester asked him how he'd like to die. And Phil just laughed, said something in French, and Daddy told me afterwards it meant, “Always the gentleman,” and he said a lot of absurd things and said ... Well, anyway, he didn't care so much how he died, if he could die with a top-hat on and at least one woman to weep at his grave.’

Four pairs of eyes fixed upon her had roused even Sheila Bitton to something like nervousness. As she came towards the end of her recital she was fidgeting and talking faster and faster. Now she cried:

‘Please, I won't ... I won't have you looking at me like that! And I won't be put upon, and nobody ever tells me anything, and I know I've said something I shouldn't. What is he matter?’

She sprang up. Dalrye put a clumsy hand on her shoulder.

He said: ‘My dear! ... ‘and stopped because he had nothing to say.

‘My dear Miss Bitton,’ the chief inspector said, briskly, - ‘you've said nothing wrong at all. Mr Dalrye will explain, presently. But now about this morning, at the breakfast table. What was it your Uncle said about seeing Philip today?’

She hesitated, looked at Dalrye, and wet her lips.

‘Why, there wasn't anything much. Only Uncle Lester said he was

going to have a talk with Phil today. And when I said that, about Phil meaning to go to the Tower at one o'clock, he said he thought he'd better run over to Phil's flat in the morning.'

‘And did he?’

‘Uncle Lester? Yes, he did. I saw him when he carne back about noon. .. And I remember, Uncle Lester said to Daddy, “Oh, I say, you'd better let me have your key, in case he isn't in this morning; I'll sit down and wait for him.”

‘Your father has a key to this flat?’

‘I told you,’ Sheila answered with some bitterness, ‘he treats us all like kids. That was one of the things that used to make Phil furious with him. He said he wouldn't pay for Phil's flat unless he could have a key, so that he could see what was going on whenever he wanted to.... Fancy! So Daddy gave Uncle Lester the key.’

Hadley bent forward. ‘Did he see Phil this morning?’

‘No, he didn't, because I saw him when he came back. And Phil was out, and Uncle Lester, waited half an hour and left. He seemed to be ...’

‘Angry?’ prompted Hadley, as she hesitated.

‘No-o. Sort of tired and shaky. I know he'd over exerted himself. And ... funny. He seemed queer, too, and excited; and he laughed.’

‘Laughed?’

‘Hold on!’ Dr Fell suddenly boomed. He was having trouble keeping his glasses on his nose, and he held them to look at the girl. ‘Tell me, my dear. Was he carrying anything when he came back?’

‘This,’ she cried again - ‘this is something horrible to do with Uncle Lester, and I won't have it! He's the only one who's really frightfully nice to me, and he is, and I won't have it.’

She was stamping on the floor, bewildered, turning suddenly to Dalrye...:

‘I'll be damned,’ the other flared, ‘if she answers you another question. Listen, Sheila. Go into the other rooms and see if there's anything you want to take along....’

Hadley was about to interpose when Dr Fell silenced him with a fierce gesture. Then the doctor spoke amiably:

‘It’s quite all right, my dear. I hadn’t meant to upset you, and it wasn’t, important, anyway. Do as Mr Dalrye suggests, please.... But there is one thing ... You know, I asked you on the telephone whether you would bring somebody along to help you with your things. And I suggested your father’s valet...?’

‘Marks?’ she exclaimed, puzzled. ‘Why, yes. I forgot. He’s out in the car’

‘Thank you, my dear. There isn’t anything else.’

‘You go in there and look about, Sheila,’ Dalrye suggested. ‘I’ll join you in a moment.’

He waited until the door had closed. Then he turned slowly. There was dull colour under, his cheekbones; he was still visibly shaken, and his mouth worked.

‘Listen,’ he said. His voice was thick. ‘He cleared it with an effort. ‘I understand all your implications, of course. And you know how much I thought of Phil. But so far as Mr Lester Bitton’s concerned I feel the way she does. And I’ll tell you you’re a lot of damned fools. I know him pretty well. Sheila didn’t tell you he was the one who stood up for our marriage when the old man was against it.

‘He’s not likeable on the surface, as General Mason is. Bitton’s cold and efficient when you just look at him. He’s not clever, or a good talker. But he’s .. you’re ... a ... lot ... of ... fools,’ Dalrye said, suddenly, miserable.

Hadley drummed his fingers on his brief-case.

‘Tell us the truth, Mr Dalrye,’ he said, after a time. ‘We’ve pretty well found out that there was an affair between Mrs Bitton and Driscoll. Did you know about it?’

‘I give you my word,’ said Dalrye, simply, ‘I didn’t. Believe me or not. I only got wind of it ... well, afterwards. Phil wouldn’t have been such a fool as to tell me. I’d have covered him, I suppose, because ... oh, well, you can see. But I’d have stopped it, somehow.’

‘And do you suppose Sir William knew of it?’

‘O Lord, no! He’s the last person who would. He’s too tied up with his books and his lectures about how the government is running on senile decay.... But, for God’s sake, find out who killed Phil!’

‘We are going to begin,’ Dr Fell said, quietly, ‘in precisely two minutes. I mean, we are going to dispose of the nonsense, and then see our way straight to the sense.’ Mr Dalrye, will you step outside and ask that valet chap, Marks, to step in here?’

Dalrye hesitated, running a hand through his hair; but at the doctor’s imperious gesture he hurried out.

‘Now!’ urged Dr Fell, hammering his stick on the floor. ‘Set that table over in front of me. That’s it, my boy, hurry!’ He struggled up as Rampole lifted the heavy table and set it down with a thump before him. ‘Now, Hadley, give me your brief-case....’

‘Here!’ protested the chief inspector; ‘stop scattering those papers all over the table!’

Rampole stared in astonishment as the doctor waddled over and picked up a bridge-lamp with a powerful electric bulb. Reeling out its cord from the baseboard, he set the lamp at some short distance from the table.’ Then he rolled a low chair under it, and switched on the light. Rampole found the chief inspector’s black notebook thrust into his hands.

‘That, my boy, is for you,’ said the doctor. ‘Sit down here beside me, on my left. Have you a pencil? ... Good! When I give you the word, you are to pretend to be making shorthand notes.’

Hadley made motions like one who sees a priceless vase tottering on the edge of a shelf. ‘Don’t! .. Look here, those are all my notes ; and if you muck them up! .. You fat lunatic, what is all this ...’

‘Don’t argue,’ said the doctor, testily. ‘Have you got a revolver and a pair of handcuffs on you?’

Hadley looked at him. He said:

‘Fell, you’re stark, staring mad! They only carry those things in the stories and on the films. I haven’t had a revolver or a pair of handcuffs in my hands for ten years.’

‘Then I have,’ the doctor said, composedly. ‘I knew you’d forget them.’ With the air of a conjuror he produced from his hip pockets

both the articles he had mentioned and held them up, beaming. He pointed the revolver at Rampole and added, 'Bang!'

'Look out!' shouted the chief inspector, seizing at his arm. 'Be careful with that thing!'

'You needn't worry. It's a dummy pistol even a Scotland Yard man couldn't hurt himself with it. It's just painted tin, you see. The handcuffs are dummies, too, but they both look realistic. I got them at one of those curio shop places in Glasshouse Street, where you buy all the trick things. Here are some more of them. I couldn't resist buying several. There's 'a mouse that runs across the table on some sort of roller when, you press him down', - he was fumbling in his pockets - 'but we don't need 'em now. Ah, here was what I wanted.'

With manifest pride on his large red face he produced an enormous and impressive-looking gold badge, which he hung on his lapel conspicuously.

'To the man we're going to question,' he observed, 'we have got to look like a real crowd of detectives. That we do not look like, the same to the chief of the C.I.D. is of no consequence. But we have got to look the part for Mr Marks's benefit or we shall get nothing out of him. The handcuffs will lie before me, and you, Hadley, will be suggestively fingering the revolver. My young friend here will take down his testimony. ... Turn out those centre lights, will you?' he added to Rampole. 'Just the brilliant spotlight on his face, and ourselves in shadow. I think I shall keep on my hat. We now look sufficiently like the classic group, I think, to have our pictures taken.'

Rampole inspected them as he went to turn out the centre lights. There was a slight suggestion of people having their pictures taken at one of those beach-resort places where you put, your head over the top of a cardboard airship and look foolish. Dr Fell was sitting back sternly, and Hadley looked with a weird expression at the tin revolver hanging by the trigger-guard from one finger. Then there were footfalls in the vestibule. Dr Fell said, 'Hist!' and Rampole hastily extinguished the centre lights.

Dalrye saw the tableau a moment later, and jumped violently.

'Bring in the accused!' Dr Fell intoned, with a voice strongly suggestive of Hamlet's father's Ghost.

'Bring in who?' said Dalrye.

'Bring in Marks and lock the door.'

'You can't do it,' said Dalrye, after a moment's inspection. 'The lock's broken.'

'Well, shoot him in,' the Ghost suggested, in a more matter-of-fact tone, 'and stand against it, then.'

'Right-ho,' said Dalrye. He was not sure what was going on, but he caught the cue, and frowned sternly as he ushered in Marks.'

The man who appeared was mild, and correct, and very nervous. Not a wrinkle in his neat clothes was out of place, and there was no guile in him. He had a long, lean head, with thin black hair parted sharply in the middle and brushed behind each large, ear.

At the sight of the tableau he froze. Nobody spoke.

'You - you wished to speak to me, sir?' he said, in a curious voice, with a slight jump at the end of it

'Sit down,' said Dr Fell:

Another silence, while Marks's eyes took in the properties. He lowered himself gingerly into the chair.

'Sergeant Rampole,' said the doctor, 'take down this man's testimony.... Your name?'

'Theophilus Marks, sir.'

Rampole made two crosses and a' squiggle. Occupation?'

'I am employed by Sir William Bitton, of Berkeley Square, sir. I - I hope, sir,' said Marks, swallowing, 'that this is not in connexion with - with that dreadful business, sir, of Mr Philip .

'Your last position?'

'For fifteen years sir, 'I had the honour to serve Lord Sandival,' Marks said, eagerly.

'Aha!' rumbled the doctor, closing one eye. He looked rather as the Ghost would have looked had he caught Hamlet playing pinochle when he should have been attending to business. 'Why did you leave your last place? Sacked?'

'No, sir! It was the death of His Lordship, sir.'

'M'm. Murdered, I suppose?' inquired the Ghost.

'Good Heavens, no sir!'

Marks was visibly wilting. The Ghost became practical. 'Now, look here, Marks, I don't mind telling you you're in a very had corner.. You've got a good position, haven't you?'

'Yes, sir. And I'm sure Sir William will give me the highest... '

'He won't, Marks, if he knows what we know. Would you like to lose your position, and go to gaol besides?' rumbled Dr Fell, picking up the handcuffs.

Marks moved backwards, his forehead damp.

'Marks,' said the Ghost, 'give me your hat!'

As the valet held out his bowler, they could see under the light the large gold letters BITTON on the inside of the white lining in the crown. 'Aha!' said the Ghost. 'Pinching Sir William's hats, eh?'

'No, sir!' Marks cried. 'Sir William gave me that hat. I wear the same size as he does. And he gave me that because he bought two new hats only, recently, and if you'll only let me prove it, sir ... !'

'I'll give you your chance,' said the Ghost, ominously. He thrust his hand across the table. It held something round and flat and black ; there was a click, and it leaped full grown into an opera-hat., 'Put this hat on, Marks!'

By this time Rampole was so bewildered that he almost expected to see Dr Fell take from the hat a brace of rabbits. Marks stared. -

'This is Sir William's hat!' shouted the Ghost, 'Put it on. If it fits you, I'll believe what you say.'

He began to stab with the hat in the direction of Marks's forehead. The valet was compelled to put it on. It was too large; not so, large as it had been on, the body of Driscoll, but still too large.

'So-ho!' rumbled the Ghost, standing up behind the table. Absently he had been fumbling in his pockets; the Ghost was excited, and making gestures with anything he could lay hold of. Dr Fell lifted his hand and shook it in the air. 'Confess, Marks!' he thundered.

'Miserable wretch, your guilt has found you out!'

He crashed his hand down on the table. To Marks's stupefaction, and Dr Fell's own irritation at the anti-climax, a large rubber mouse with white whiskers popped out of his hand and ambled slowly across the table towards Hadley. Dr Fell snatched it up hastily and put it into his pocket.

'Hem!' observed the Ghost. Then he paused, and added something which really brought Hadley out of his chair. 'Marks,' said Dr Fell, 'you stole Sir William's manuscript:

For a moment it looked as though the other were going to faint.

'I swear I didn't! But I didn't know, and I was afraid to tell when he explained it to me ... !'

'I'll tell you what you did, Marks,' said Dr Fell, forgetting all about the Ghost and threatening in a natural voice. 'Sir William gave me all the facts. You're a good valet, Marks, but you're one of the stupidest creatures in God's` world. Sir William bought two new hats on Saturday. One of the opera-hats he tried on at the shop was too large for him. But a mistake was made, and they sent the large one to him along with the Homburg, which was of the right size. Ha? You saw it. You wear the same size. But Sir William was going out to the theatre that night. You know what sort of a temper he has. If he found a hat that slid down over his forehead, he'd make it hot for the first person he could lay hands on....'

'Naturally you wanted his hat to be the right size, didn't you, Marks? But there wasn't time to get another hat; it was Saturday evening. So you did the natural thing. You used the same quick makeshift people have been using since hats were invented. You neatly stuffed the band on the inside with paper, the first harmless-looking paper you could find....'

Hadley flung the tin revolver on the table. 'Good God, he said, 'do you seriously mean to tell us that Marks tightened up the fit of that hat with Sir William's manuscript?'

'Sir William,' the doctor said, amiably, 'gave us two clues himself which were absolutely, revealing. He said that the manuscript consisted of thin sheets of paper folded several times lengthwise, and rather long. Try folding over any piece of paper that way, and you'll get a long, narrow, compact set, admirably suited for stuffing the lining of a hat. And do you remember what he said besides? The

manuscript was wrapped in tissue paper. Taken all together it was the obvious thing for Marks to use.'

'But Bitton said it was in the drawer.'

'I doubt that,' said Dr Fell. 'Was it, Marks?'

Marks brushed a handkerchief over his damp forehead. 'N-no, sir,' he faltered. 'It was lying there on the desk. I - I didn't think it was important. It was tissue-paper with some crackly stuff inside, the sort of thing they use to pack objects in cardboard boxes.'

'And then,' said Dr Fell, 'you learned next day what you'd done. You learned it was worth thousands of pounds. And so you were afraid to tell Sir William what you'd done, because in the meantime the hat had been stolen.' He turned to Hadley. 'I rather thought this was the case, from Sir William's description of Marks's behaviour when he interviewed him afterwards. Sir William made us an invaluable suggestion, which he thought was satiric. He said; "Do you think I go about carrying valuable manuscripts in my hat?" And that's precisely what he did.'

'And that,' Hadley said in a queer voice, 'that was why Sir William's hat fitted him. It's what you meant by your hint!'

'It's what I meant by telling you we had got to clear away all the nonsense from this case before we could see the truth. That one little accident precipitated a whole series of ghastly events. I was staking everything on my belief that that's what had happened. Now I know the whole truth.... But you can see for yourself why I couldn't have Sir William with me when I was questioning Marks.'

The valet removed the opera-hat and was holding it like a bomb. His face was dull and helpless.

'All right,' he said in a normal, human, almost even tone. 'All right, gents. You've, got me. That means my job. What are you going to do with me?'

'Eh?' said Dr Fell. 'Oh! No, Marks. You're safe enough. Now you walk out to the car again, and sit there till you're called. I won't tell Sir William.'

The mild little man thrust himself out violently. 'Honest to God?' he demanded. 'Do you mean it?' 'I mean it, Marks.'

There was a pause. Marks drew himself up and adjusted his, impeccable coat. 'Very good, sir,' he said in a precise tone. 'I'm sure I'm very grateful, sir.'

'Turn on the centre lights,' Dr Fell suggested to Rampole, 'and give Hadley's notebook back before he gets apoplexy.' Beaming, the doctor sat down behind the table and produced the rubber mouse. He pushed his shovel-hat to the back of his head, and set the mouse to running in circles over the table. 'This almost marred my effect. I say, Hadley, I'm devilish sorry I didn't think to buy a pair of false whiskers.'

As the lights went on, Hadley, Rampole,' and a very excited Dalrye almost literally seized him.

'Let me get all this straight,' the chief inspector said, heavily. 'On Saturday night Bitton walked out of his house with that manuscript in his hat. And this Mad Hatter chap stole the hat....'

'Ah,' said the doctor, sombrely. 'There's where everything started to go wrong. Over and over, with tears in my eyes, I've implored you to believe that the last thing in the world Driscoll wanted to do was even to touch Bitton's beloved manuscript. And so what must have been his horror when he discovered he'd done the one thing in the world he didn't want to do....!'

During a frozen silence Dr Fell picked up the mouse, put it down, and glanced thoughtfully at his companions. 'Driscoll was the hat-thief, you see,' he said.

15

The A fair of the Rubber Mouse

'WAIT a minute!' protested Rampole. 'They're coming over the plate too fast for me You mean ... '

'Just what I say,' the doctor answered, testily. 'Nobody could have doubted it from the first. I had proof of it here to-night; but I had to come here and get the proof before you would have believed me.

'Consider. Here's a crazy young fellow with a sense of humour and lots of intelligence. He wants to make a name for himself as a newspaperman. He can turn out a good, vivid news-story when he has, the facts; but he has so little news-sense that one managing editor swears he wouldn't scent a wedding if he walked through an inch of rice in front of a church.

‘That’s not only understandable, Hadley, but it’s a further clue to his character. His long suit was imagination. The very imaginative people never make good straight reporters, they’re looking for the picturesque, the bizarre, the ironic incident; and very often they completely neglect to bother about essential facts. Driscoll would have made a thundering good columnist, but as a reporter he was a failure. So he resolved to do what many a reporter has done before him: to create news, and the sort of news that would appeal to him.

‘In every one of these important hat-thefts there was a sort of ironic symbolism, as though the stage had been arranged by an actor. Driscoll loved gestures, and he loved symbolism. A policeman’s helmet is propped on a lamp-standard outside Scotland Yard; “Behold the power of the police!” says the Byronic Mr Driscoll, with the usual cynicism of very young people. A barrister’s wig is put on a cab-horse, which was the nearest approach Driscoll could get towards underlining Mr Bumble’s opinion that the law is an ass.’

Dr Fell paused to settle more comfortably. Hadley stared at him, and then the chief inspector nodded.

‘Now I shouldn’t go into this so thoroughly,’ the doctor went on, ‘except that, it’s a clue to the murder, as you’ll see. He was preparing for another coup, a real and final coup, which couldn’t help making - in his eyes - the whole of England sit up.’ The doctor pawed among the papers he had taken from Hadley’s brief-case. ‘Here’s his notebook, with those notes which puzzled you so much. Before I read them to you again; let me remind you that Driscoll himself gave the whole show away. You recall that drunken evening with Mrs Bitton, which Mrs Larkin described for us, when Driscoll prophesied what was going to happen a week before it did begin to happen? He mentioned events which were shortly to occur, and which would make his name as a newspaperman. An artist, when comfortably filled with beer, can talk at length about the great picture he intends to paint, without exciting the least surprise. But when a newspaperman casually mentions what corking stories he is going to turn out about the murder which is to take place next week, there is likely to be considerable curiosity about his powers of foresight.

‘But let’s return to this big stroke Driscoll was planning, after having built up to it by degrees with lesser hats. First, you see, he carefully stole the crossbow bolt out of Bitton’s house...’

‘He did what?’ shouted the chief inspector.

‘Oh, yes; I must tell you about that,’ Dr Fell said, frowning as though he were a trifle annoyed with himself. ‘It was Driscoll who stole it. By the way he rummaged on the floor at the side of his chair, and brought up the tool-basket. After fumbling inside it, he produced what he wanted ... ‘by the way, here’s the file he used to-sharpen it. It’s rather an old file, so you can see the oblique lines in, the dirt-coating where lie sawed at the barbs of the head. And here are the straighter marks to show where he had started effacing the Souvenir de Carcassonne, before somebody stole the bolt from him to use for another purpose... Hadley took the file and turned it over. ‘Then I asked you, you know, why that engraving hadn’t been entirely obliterated, provided the person who had sharpened the bolt was really the murderer. Let’s suppose it had been the murderer. He started in to do it, so why in the name of madness didn’t he go on? It was obvious that he didn’t want the bolt traced, as it would have been and as it was. But he stopped after a neat job on just three letters. It was only when I realized what was up - an explanation provided by those abstruse notes in Driscoll’s notebook that I realized it wasn’t the murderer’s doing at all. It was Driscoll’s. He hadn’t finished his job of effacing when along came the murderer: who didn’t care where the bolt came from, or whose it was. But, actually this bolt was planned as a part of Driscoll’s most daring venture.’

‘But, good God, what venture?’ demanded Hadley. ‘There’s no way to associate it with the hats.’

‘Oh yes, there is,’ said Dr Fell. ‘Hadley, who is the man, above all you can think of, who ranks in the popular eye as England’s leading jingo? Who is the man who still makes speeches in private life, as he used to do in public life, about thee might, of the sword, the longbow, the crossbow, and the stout hearts of old? Who is always agitating for bigger armaments? Who is for ever attacking the Prime Minister as a dangerous pacifist? Who, at any rate, is inevitably the person Driscoll would think of in that role?’

‘You mean - Sir William Bitton....’

‘I mean just that,’ nodded the doctor. A grin creased up his chins. ‘And that insane nephew of his had conceived a design which satisfied all the demands of his sensation-loving soul.... He was going to steal Sir William Bitton’s hat and nail it with a crossbow bolt to the door of Number 10 Downing Street.’

Hadley was more than shocked. He was genuinely outraged. For a moment he could only sputter ; and Dr Fell contemplated him with

amiable mockery.

'Look here.' The doctor opened Driscoll's notebook. 'See how he's musing about, this scheme. He hasn't quite worked it out yet. All he has is the idea of fastening Sir William's hat with this warlike instrument in some public place. So he writes, inquiringly: "Best place? Tower? But, of course, that won't do; it's much too easy, and a crossbow bolt in the Tower would be as conspicuous as a small bit of coal at Newcastle. However, he's got to have his properties first, and writes, "Track down hat," which is obvious. Then he thinks about Trafalgar Square again, as he inevitably must. But that won't do, because he certainly can't drive his bolt into the stone of the Nelson monument. So he writes, "Unfortunate Trafalgar, can't transfix!" But it wasn't so unfortunate, for his burst of inspiration comes and you note the exclamation points to denote it. He's got it now. He notes down Number 10 home of the Prime Minister. The next, words you can easily see. Is the door made of wood? If it's steel-bound, or something of the sort, the scheme won't work ; he doesn't know. He must find out. Is there a hedge, or anything that will screen him from observation while he does it? Are there guards about, as there are likely to be? He doesn't know this, either. It's a long chance, and a risky one; but he's jubilant about the possibility, and he means to find out.'

Dr Fell put down the notebook.

'Thus,' he said, 'I outline to you what I, like Driscoll, intend to call symbolically the Affair of the Rubber Mouse.'

Let's see what came of it. You do see, don't you Hadley?' Again the chief inspector was pacing the room.

'I suppose I do,' he snapped. 'He waited for Sir William's car in Berkeley Street; let's see, that was Saturday night?' 'Saturday night,' affirmed the doctor. 'He was still youthful and hopeful and all the rest of it. And, incidentally, here's another ingenious feature of the scheme. In most cases there wasn't an enormous amount of risk. He stole the hats of the dignified people who wouldn't make a row about it. They certainly wouldn't report the theft to the police, to begin with. And if he were in a tight spot, it's unlikely the victim would give serious chase. That's the cunning feature. A man like Sir William would run half-way across London in pursuit of a man who'd picked his pocket of half-a crown. It would be outraged justice. But he wouldn't run a step, for fear of looking a fool, after a man who stole a two guinea hat.... Well, reconstruct, Hadley.'

'H'm. He waited for Sir William's car in Berkeley Street. Any sort of telephone call to the house, which he could properly have made in his own character, would have got him the information he wanted where, Bitton was that night, and the rest of it. And let's see. Bitton said, I think, that the chauffeur slowed down to let a blind man with some pencils get across the street

'Any sort of vendor,' agreed the doctor, 'would have crossed the street for a shilling. And Driscoll got the hat. He bargained on it that Bitton wouldn't give chase. He was right. Still, everything was fine and fair, until ...'

He peered up inquiringly at Hadley.

'Until Sunday night,' Hadley said, slowly. 'Then everything; came down on him at once when he called at the house.'

'We're on debatable ground now. But it's not a question of great importance. H'mf. It's unlikely he discovered until Sunday night that he'd unwittingly pinched the manuscript,' said Dr Fell. 'You don't pay much attention to paper inside a hatband.'

'But here's the point. On Sunday evening they told him about the theft of the manuscript. Whether he suspected something then I don't know. Undoubtedly he knew all about the manuscript, from Bitton's hints beforehand. But the other affair crashed down on him. Laura Bitton and her husband were back; Laura must have conveyed some hint of the state of affairs; there was a whispered row; Driscoll went wildly out of the house before Laura could make an appointment with him. Otherwise she would have made her appointment then, and not bothered to write.'

'Up again, down again,' muttered Hadley. 'He was afraid of the scandal, of being cut off by his uncle ...'

Dr Fell nodded sombrely.

'And a million other fancies that would come into a, head like his. Mr Dalrye said this flat was full of his presence,' the doctor said suddenly, in a louder voice. 'What must it have been like when he came home here and discovered, with one of the sickest feelings of horror he ever had, that he'd unintentionally stolen his uncle's most cherished possession? How could he explain it? Here was his uncle raving, and here he was with the manuscript how had it got into the hat to begin with? Not by any stretch of madness could he have imagined his uncle deliberately putting that fragile thing into a hat of

his own accord, and wearing it about the streets. And, worst of all, Driscoll wasn't supposed to know about the manuscript in the first place!'

'Imagine that wild, red-headed kid running about here like a bat trying to get out! A moment before, he'd been the reckless adventurer. Now he was threatened with a hellish scandal, with the price of swaggering, and worst of all with his ugly-tempered uncle.'

'If he had been sensible,' the chief inspector growled, 'he'd have gone to his uncle, and...' Would- he?' Dr Fell frowned. 'I wonder if even a sensible person would have done that: at least, with Sir William Bitton. What could Driscoll say? "Oh, I say, uncle, I'm sorry. Here's your Poe manuscript. I pinched it by mistake at the same time I pinched your hat" Can you imagine the result? Driscoll wasn't supposed to know about the manuscript; nobody was. Bitton imagined he was being very sly and clever, when he was advertising its presence all the time. To begin with, he wouldn't have believed Driscoll. What would you think of somebody who walked in and said, "By, the way, Hadley, you know that thousand-pound bank-note you've been hiding away from everybody in your

drawer upstairs? Well, when I was stealing your umbrella last night, I accidentally discovered the bank-note hanging by a string from the handle of the umbrella., Odd, what?" No, my boy. You'd scarcely have been in a receptive mood. And if, to cap the business your brother later came in and observed, "Yes, Hadley, and the curious thing is that I discovered in that chap's flat not only your umbrella and. your thousand pound note, but also my wife, I venture to suggest, old man, that you would have thought your friend's conduct at least a trifle eccentric:

Dr Fell snorted.

'Perhaps that's what the sensible man would, have done. But Driscoll wasn't sensible. Call him anything else you like, but not a clear thinker.'

Dr Fell bent forward and prodded the rubber mouse with his forefinger. It ran round in a circle on the table and bounced off.

'For the Lord's sake,' cried the exasperated chief inspector, 'let that mouse alone and get on with it! So he wrestled 'with- this thing all night, and in the morning he telephoned Mr Dalrye here and determined to tell him everything?'

'Exactly.'

Dalrye, who had been sitting quietly all through this, turned a puzzled face.

'Yes, but there's another thing,' he observed. 'I say, Doctor, why didn't he come to me straight away? If he were as upset as all that, he would have come down to the Tower immediately, wouldn't he?'

'No,' said the doctor. 'And I shall now expound to you, children, why. It is the point which confirmed my suspicions of the whole affair. I mean the second attack on Sir William Bitton.'

'Good Lord, yes ...!' Hadley stopped his pacing. 'If Driscoll did all this, why did he steal a second hat from Bitton? That wasn't precisely the way to get him out of the scrape, was it?'

'No. But it was a piece of remarkably quick thinking in an emergency.'

'Maybe it was,' the chief inspector admitted, gloomily. 'But it would seem to me somewhat to complicate matters. He'd have another explanation to add to his uncle when he'd finished the ones you were outlining a minute ago.'

'Be quiet and let me talk. He was going to get Mr Dalrye's help, but, before he did, he intended to make one last effort to help himself. You see, I rather wondered why he had definitely, made the appointment at the Tower for one o'clock when he could easily have gone down there in the morning. And, having made the appointment,' he didn't appear, until nearly twenty minutes past one! What held him up? If anything, you would have, expected him to be ahead of time. ... What he was going to do was make an attempt to return the manuscript, unknown to his uncle.

'That was rather more difficult an undertaking than it sounds. He knew positively, from what he had heard at the house, that his uncle didn't connect the theft of the manuscript with the theft of, the hat. Suppose, then, Driscoll simply put it into an envelope and sent it back to his uncle by post? Too dangerous! Driscoll knew Arbor was in the house. He had heard Arbor's broad talk at the dinner table. He knew that his uncle would never believe Arbor had first stolen the manuscript, and then posted it back again. And if Arbor were eliminated ... you: see?'

'Yes. If Arbor were eliminated, the only person who could have

stolen it was a member of his own household.'

'Then what follows? Sir William would know it hadn't been one of the servants ; he ridiculed that idea when he talked to us. There would remain Lester Bitton, Laura Bitton, Sheila, and Driscoll. Lester and Laura Bitton were definitely several hundred miles away when it was stolen. Only four people could have known about that manuscript, and two of them were in Cornwall; Of the other two, Sheila could hardly have been regarded as the culprit. Inevitably Driscoll must come to be suspected, and be thought to have sent it back in a fit of conscience - which would be precisely like Driscoll, anyway. Rest assured Driscoll knew all this, and he knew that his uncle would suspect it if he posted back that manuscript. But what was he to do? For the same reasons, he couldn't slip into the house and drop the manuscript somewhere so that it would be found. Sir William knew damned well it hadn't been mislaid.'

'I'm hanged if I can see what he could do,' the chief inspector confessed. 'Unless he simply sat tight and let his uncle suspect Arbor. But a nervous type like Driscoll would always have the horrible fear that his uncle might, somehow find out. What he'd want most to do would be get the thing out of his hands - quickly.'

'Precisely! And that,' said Dr Fell, rapping his stick on the floor, 'is where, for a second, he completely lost his head. He wanted to get it out of his hands. It was almost literally burning his fingers. He went out, on that misty day, and paced the streets. And with every step he was gravitating towards his uncle's house, with possibilities multiplying and whirling in his brain, until he lost his head altogether.'

'Hadley, do you, remember what time Sir William arrived this afternoon at the bar where he met us? It was close on two o'clock. And when he described the theft of his second hat to us, he said, "It happened an hour and a half ago, and I'm still boiling." It happened, then, roughly, at about twenty minutes to one. Sir William was ready to make his monthly round of calls, as he told us and, as he also told us, they rarely varied. It was the afternoon for his monthly call on Driscoll, by the way. I believe be pointed that out.... His car was standing in the mist at the kerb. His chauffeur had gone down to buy cigarettes, and Sir William had not yet stepped out of the house. And Driscoll was there at the corner, watching it.'

'I'm beginning to remember a lot of things Bitton said,' the chief inspector answered grimly. 'He told us he saw somebody with his arm through the window of the car,

fumbling with the side pocket' You mean - 'Driscoll couldn't stand it any longer; and he wanted to shove the manuscript into the pocket of the car?'

'I do. And he was prevented by Sir William's instant arrival on the scene. Sir William thought he was a sneak-thief. He didn't mind chasing sneak-thieves: He yelled, "Hi !" and charged - and Driscoll (probably instinctively) did the only piece of quick thinking I've known him to-do yet. He snatched Sir William's hat and darted away in the mist,

'You mean...'

'Instinctive experience, my boy. Because he knew the old man wouldn't chase him.'

'Good,' said Hadley, in a low voice, after a pause. 'Damned good. But you're forgetting one thing. He may really have put that manuscript into the pocket of the car and it may still be there.'

Dr Fell blinked sadly at the mouse he had resurrected' from the floor:

'Sorry, I'm afraid you're about eleven hours too late. You see, even in the rush of going to the Tower in Bitton's car, I didn't neglect to examine the pockets this afternoon. It wasn't there. Driscoll never put it in.'

There was a faint smile on Hadley's face.

'Now, then, let me reassemble my facts,', he suggested. 'You say Driscoll went out comparatively early this morning and never came back?'

'Yes.'

'He took the manuscript. But the stolen top-hat was here?'

'probably.'

'Also... the crossbow bolt was here?' 'Yes.' .

'Then,' said Hadley, with sudden grimness, 'our case is complete. Lester Bitton came over here to see Driscoll this morning, when Driscoll was out. He let himself in with a key he borrowed from his brother, and returned to his home at noon, where Miss Bitton saw him

coming in ... what did she say?..., "shaken and laughing".

‘Anybody could have taken that crossbow bolt from the Bitton house. But only Lester Bitton could have stolen it from this flat. Anybody might have stolen Sir William's top hat. But, only Lester Bitton could have taken that top-hat from this flat to put on the head of the man he stabbed at the Tower of London, so that he could give Driscoll the fulfilment of his wish. And Driscoll did die in, a top-hat, with at least one woman to weep at his grave.’

Dr Fell let his glasses fall on their black ribbon,, and ,massaged his eyes fiercely. ‘Yes,’ he said from between his hands, in a muffled voice. ‘I’d thought of that, too. I’m afraid it rather sews him up. That’s why I asked Miss Bitton whether he was carrying anything when he returned.’

They had not realized, in the slow passing of hours, how imperceptibly the night noises of London had faded. Even the muted roar, always in the background, had died until their voices sounded unnaturally loud. They had not been aware of the creaking of boards, or how sharply rose the singing of tyres when a late car hummed in the square. But even through a closed door they could hear the telephone bell.

Sheila Bitton’s voice could be heard, too, when she answered it. And in a moment she thrust her face round the door.

‘It’s for you, Mr Hadley,’ she said. ‘Something about a Mr Arbor. Is that our Mr Arbor?’

Hadley almost broke into a run.

10

What Was Left in the Fireplace

SHEILA BITTON jumped in astonishment when she saw the expressions on the faces of those who crowded past her. Her own expression indicated that it was undignified. She had discarded hat and coat, to show fluffy yellow hair tousled about; her head, and a dark frock with the sleeves now rolled up about the wrists.

Hadley was at the telephone, and Dr Fell bent over him' in the little, study. On the doctor's face was an expression Rampole had never seen before he ' could not decide whether it was nervousness, or fear, or hope. But Dr Fell was certainly nervous. Rampole never forgot the

weird picture they presented in that time.... Hadley listening intently to a buzz where words were almost distinguishable in the silent room; Dr Fell bent forward against the line of the bookshelves ; the black ribbon on his glasses dangling, his shovel-hat on the back of his head.

Silence, except for the faint, rapid voice in the telephone. Hadley spoke only twice, in monosyllables. Then, without hanging up the receiver, he turned.

'Well?' demanded Dr Fell.

'It worked. Arbor, left his friends, the Spenglers, early in the evening, and Spengler walked with him to his cottage. Our plain-clothes man was watching from the garden ; he'd got his instructions already, and he seems to have played up to them. First Arbor went through the cottage, switching on all the lights, but he immediately closed the shutters after he'd done it. There are diamond-shaped holes in the bottoms of the shutters, though, and the constable worked close enough so that he could look in through the holes.

'Arbor and his friend were in one of the front rooms, where the covers hadn't been taken off the furniture. They were sitting in front of the fire, playing chess, with a bottle of whisky between them, and Arbor looked nervous. This, I judge, was about two hours ago. Then the constable got busy. He walked up and down loudly on the gravel, and then dodged round the side of the house. In a moment Arbor's friend, Spengler, opened the shutters and looked out then he closed them again. That sort of game went on for some time. They phoned for a policeman and the policeman flashed his bull's-eye all round the garden, but of course he didn't find our man. When it had all quieted down again, and our man was back at the window, he decided to rush matters. Arbor seemed to be trying to persuade Spengler of something, and Spengler wouldn't listen. Then our man went back and rattled the knob of the scullery door. The next minute he was around the side of the concrete garage, and it's a good thing he was. Somebody opened the scullery door and stuck out a revolver and began firing shots blindly all over the, garden. That brought down all the policemen within half a mile; there was a devil of a row and Spengler had to show his pistol permit. When the row quieted down, Arbor insisted on going to the station with them and getting in touch with me. And he insists on speaking to me personally.'

Dr Fell did, not look as pleased as circumstances seemed to warrant.,

‘What are you going to do?’

Hadley glanced at his watch and scowled. ‘It’s almost ten minutes past twelve.... H’m. But I’m afraid to put it off until morning. He’ll get a return of cheerfulness with daylight, and he may decide not to talk. We’ve got to catch him while he’s in a funk.’

‘Why not bring him here?’

‘I don’t suppose there would be any objection ... ?’ Hadley looked at Sheila Bitton. ‘That’s best. Dalrye can take Miss Bitton home. Yes, that’s it. I’ll have him brought in a police car.’

‘Wouldn’t he talk over the telephone?’

‘No. For some reason, the man seems to have developed an unholy horror of telephones.... Well?’ Hadley gave brief instructions to the other end of the wire, and hung up. ‘Fell, what do you think he knows?’

‘I’m afraid to tell you what I think. I’m literally afraid. Remember, I asked you the same question when we decided Driscoll was stabbed in the tunnel of the Bloody Tower, with Mrs Bitton at one end and Arbor at the other... .’ He had, been mumbling, and now he stopped short, altogether as he remembered Sheila’s presence. The girl was behind Dalrye in the passage, and apparently had not caught words which might have caused unnecessary questions. The doctor peered towards the passage, and chewed the end of his moustache. ‘Never mind. We shall know soon enough.’

Hadley was examining the study. Sheila Bitton had added to its disorder. In the centre of the floor she had been piling all sorts of mementoes: a couple of silver cups, framed photographs of sport groups, a cricket bat, a runner’s jersey, a china mug.

‘I wish you men would, get out!’ the girl’s voice complained fretfully. She pushed her way past Dalrye with dolllike aggressiveness. ‘Everything is in such a mess! Phil would never keep tidy. And I’m sure I don’t know what to do with his clothes. There’s one brand-new nice grey hat I know belongs to Daddy, because it’s got that gold lettering he uses on the inside, and how it came to be here I can’t think.’

‘Eh?’ demanded Hadley. His eyes narrowed and he looked at the doctor. ‘Do you think he came back here after he’d ... I mean, just before he went to the Tower?’

'I'm fairly certain he did,' Dr Fell answered. 'After he'd done what you're thinking about, he still had over twenty minutes to get to the Tower in time for his appointment, you remember. But he was twenty minutes late for it ... It's all right, Miss Bitton. Just put the hat aside with the other things.'

'Anyhow, I hope you'll get out,' she said, practically. 'Bob, you might call Marks and have him take an armload of those things out to the car. I'm filthy, absolutely filthy.'

And he's got oil spilled all over the desk where the typewriter is, and a piece of sharp stone I almost cut my finger on:

Hadley turned round slowly to inspect the desk. Rampole had an image of Driscoll sitting under the green-shaded lamp in this cluttered room, patiently sharpening the crossbow bolt which was to be driven into his own heart....

'Whetstone,' murmured the chief inspector. 'And the typewriter.... By the way, Doctor, you found the tool you wanted, right enough ; but I remember you said you were looking for something in his typewriter. What was it?'

"I was looking for the beginning of a certain news-story which gave an account of something before it occurred: I mean that little business at No.10. I wasn't sure he'd started it, but I thought I'd better have a look in case you didn't believe me. It wasn't in his typewriter, but it was on the desk I have it in my pocket. If he intended to scoop Fleet Street, you see, he wanted time to prepare a corking good story before the other reporters even heard of it. But there was such a litter of manuscript I almost overlooked it. He's been doing a bit of dabbling with fiction, too, I see'

Sheila Bitton stamped her foot. 'Oh, good gracious, will you get out? I think it's mean of you, when poor Phil's dead, to sit here in his room like this, just talking. And if you want any of that writing, or all those papers, or anything, you'd better tell me, because I'm just going to put it all in a suit-box and take it home for Daddy; he'll want to keep it. Besides, some of it's burnt in the fireplace and you can't have it, and I looked in there because it was written in longhand and it might be a letter. She paused and flushed suddenly: 'Anyway, it was just an old story.'

'Oh my God!' said Dr Fell.

His great bulk lunged across the room to the toy fireplace with its

bright-red bricks round the grate. He added, 'Get your, flashlight, Hadley,' and bent to his knees, pushing away the iron fender. There was a startled expression on the chief inspector's own face as he yanked out his flashlight.

The fireplace was full of charred and feathered paper. As the bright beam played inside, they saw that the edging of some of the paper not wholly burned was of a dull mauve colour, blackened by smoke.

'The "Mary" letters,' Hadley said, as Dr Fell tried lightly to lift the mass. 'All that's left of them.'

Dr Fell grunted wheezily. 'Yes. And here underneath them...'

He tried to draw it out gently, but it was only a delicate black shell, and it crumpled to ash. All that remained were a few smoke-fouled inches at the top. It had been a very thin sheaf of damp-stained sheets, folded three times lengthwise, and now open. Holding it gently, in his open palms, Dr Fell put it close to, Hadley's light. There had been a title, but the smoke had, yellowed and obliterated it; likewise it had obliterated all the letters in the corner except; an ornate 'E.' But, in brown and curly script, they, could faintly see a number of lines which the fire had not destroyed:

'Of the singular gifts of my friend the Chevalier Auguste Dupin, I may, one day speak. Upon my lips; he has placed a seal of silence which, for fear of displeasing the eccentricities of his somewhat outre humour, I dare not at present violate. I can, therefore, only record that it was after dark one gusty evening in the year 18- that a knock sounded at the door of my chambers in a dim, decaying pile of buildings of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, and...'

'There it is,' the doctor growled in a low voice, after a pause. 'All of him, in the start of one paragraph. The finger on the lip. The suavity,, the hint of deadly secrets. The night, the night wind, the distant city, the date mysteriously left blank, the old and crumbling house in a remote quarter ... H'm. Gentlemen, you are looking at all that is left of the first detective story ever written by Edgar Allan Poe.'

Hadley arose and switched off his light. 'Well,' he said, gloomily, 'there goes ten thousand pounds. It's a good job Arbor doesn't have to pay the rest of his agreement to that fellow in Philadelphia.'

'I hate having to tell this to Sir William,' muttered Dalrye. 'Good God he'll be a maniac. It's a pity Phil couldn't at least have kept the thing....'

'No!' said Dr Fell, violently. 'You don't see the point. You don't grasp, it at all, and I'm ashamed of you.... What happened?'

'He burnt it,' Hadley returned. 'He was so terrified at nearly being caught when he tried to return, it, that lie came home and, chucked it in the fire.'

Dr Fell pushed himself to his feet with the aid of his cane. He was fiery with earnestness.

'You still don't understand. What happened? Who knocked at the door of this man's house in the Faubourg SaintGermain? What terrible adventure was on the way? That's what you should think of, Hadley.... I say to, you, to hell with whether this manuscript is preserved for some smug collector to prattle learnedly about and exhibit to his friends like a new gold tooth. To hell whether: it cost ten thousand pounds or a halfpenny. What I'm interested in is what magnificent dream of blood and violence began with that knock at the door.'

'All right, to hell with it,' the chief inspector agreed mildly. 'If you're really so curious, you can ask Bitton about the next instalment. He's read it'

Dr Fell shook his head. 'No,' he said. 'No, I'm never going to ask. That last line will be a deathless "to be continued in our next" for me to weave answers about it all the rest of my life. !'

'Well, let's' get out,' the chief inspector suggested. 'Whatever you want to dream about, that fireplace has at least one thing to tell us. The manuscript was lying under those burnt "Mary" letters. Driscoll burnt the manuscript before he left here on his way to the Tower. Mrs Bitton broke in at five o'clock, and destroyed the evidence against her.'

'That's right, I know,' the doctor said, wearily. 'Look here. I've been several hours without a drink.; If we could find one hereabouts . ?'

'Sound enough,' said the chief inspector. 'Then I'll outline my case to you.'

He led the way out of the little room and down to the forlorn dining-room, where he snapped on the lights of the mosaic dome over the table. Undoubtedly, Rampole thought, that dome had come with the flat; it was of ornate ugliness, with golds and reds and blues jumbled together; and it threw a harsh, weird light on their faces. Curiously enough, the impalpable presence of the dead man was stronger here than anywhere else. It was growing on Rampole with a

ghostly and horrible reality. On the mantelpiece of this dusty dining-room, a marble clock with gilt facings had stopped; stopped many days ago, for the glass face was thick with dust. But it had stopped at a quarter to two. Rampole noted the coincidence with a vivid memory of Driscoll lying white-faced and sightless on the steps of Traitors' Gate. He stared at the pieces of orange peel on the spotted cloth of the table, and shuddered.

‘Sorry’ he observed, with a sort of jerk and without conscious volition. ‘I can’t drink his whisky. It doesn’t seem right, somehow!

‘Neither can I,’ said Dalrye, quietly.

He sat down at the table and shaded his eyes with his hand.

Dr Fell turned from rummaging at the back of the sideboard, where he had found some clean glasses.

‘So you feel it too, do you?’ he demanded.

‘Feel what?’ asked the chief inspector. ‘Here’s a bottle nearly full. Make mine strong. ‘Feel what?’

‘That he’s here,’ said Dr Fell. ‘Driscoll.’

Hadley set down the bottle. ‘Don’t talk rot,’ he said, irritably. ‘What are you trying to do throw a scare into us? You look as though you were beginning to tell a ghost story.’

‘Listen, Hadley. I’m not talking about ghost stories. I won’t even say premonitions. But I’m talking about a wild surmise I had earlier in the evening, when we were talking to Lester Bitton. There was a tiny germ of reason in it, and it frightened me. Possibly it’s stronger now because the hour’s so late and we’re none of us at our brightest.... By God! I’m going to take this drink and several others, because I genuinely need ‘em. I advise the rest of you to do the same.’

Rampole felt uneasy. He thought he might look a fool or a coward; the strain of the day had made his thoughts more than a little muddled.

‘All: right’ he said, ‘all right. Pour a big one.’ He glanced across at Dalrye, who nodded wearily.

‘I think I know what you’re talking about, Doctor,’ Dalrye said, in a low voice. ‘I know I wasn’t here, and I’m not sure, but I still think I

know what you mean.'

'The person I'm interested in talking about,' Hadley interposed, 'is Lester Bitton. You're pretty well aware, aren't you, Fell, that he's the murderer?'

The doctor was setting out glasses. He took the bottle from Hadley, waved away the other's suggestion of washing the glasses, and filled them. He said: 'Suppose Bitton has an alibi? You've got almost a case to go to the jury on ... unless he has an alibi. That's what's worrying me. Tell me, Mr

Dalrye, when did you last see Sir William Bitton?'

'Sir ... ?' Dalrye raised his head and regarded the other with puzzled eyes. 'Sir William?' he repeated. 'Why, at the house to-night. General Mason suggested that I go back with him, when he returned from the Tower of London.!

'Did the general tell him about who really owned the manuscript? Arbor, I mean? Or did you know about it?'

'I knew about it. Sir William goes about telling everybody,' Dalrye answered, grimly, 'that nobody knows of the, manuscript, and then proceeds to share his secret with everybody. Did he tell you that you were the first to hear of it?'

'Yes'

'He's told both the general and myself the same thing. We heard it weeks ago.'

'What did he say when Mason told him it belonged to Arbor?'

'That's the funny part. Nothing much. He just said, "I see," and got very quiet.' It's pretty clear that he suspected as much all along. Then he said.. .'

Dalrye looked towards the door with dull eyes. It had become like a warning, repeated over and over until it grows horrible. The telephone bell was ringing again.

There was nothing in that ring that should have sent a chill through anybody. But Rampole went cold. And in the silence beneath the clamour of that insistent bell Dr- Fell said:

'I shouldn't let Miss Bitton answer that, Hadley.'

Hadley was out of the door in a moment into the study, and the door closed behind him.

While nobody moved, the rest of them could hear Sheila moving about in the kitchen down the passage Hadley did not speak for a long time on the phone. He opened the study door presently ... they could hear the sharp squeak of its hinge. Then he came with slow steps down the passage, entered, and closed the dining-room door behind him.

'It's all up,' he said. 'Get your coats on.'

'What is it?' the doctor asked.

The chief inspector put a hand over his eyes.

'I know what you mean now. I should have seen what sort of mood he was in when he left us. At least, I should have been warned by what Miss Bitton said. That was the way he said he wanted to die.'

Dr Fell brought his hand slowly down on the table. 'Is it ... ?'

'Yes,' Hadley answered, nodding. 'That's it. Lester Bitton has shot himself.'

17

Death at Bitton House

DURING the ride in Hadley's car to Berkeley Square, the only words spoken were questions and answers on the little Hadley had been told about the tragedy.

'It happened about ten minutes before they phoned,' he explained. 'That was the butler talking. The household had been up late, and the butler was still' sitting up; he'd been ordered to wait for Sheila Bitton's return. He was in his pantry when he heard the shot, and he ran upstairs. The door of Lester Bitton's room: was open; he smelled the smoke. Bitton was lying across the bed in his room, with the gun in his hand.'

'What happened then?' Dr Fell demanded.

'Hobbes ... that's the butler ... tried to wake up Sir William. But he'd taken a sleeping-draught and the door of his room was locked; Hobbes

couldn't rouse him. Then Hobbes remembered Miss Bitton's talking to us, and where we were, so he phoned on the chance of getting me.'

The moist, chill air whipped through the open windscreen the tyres of the car sang, and above the roofs there were stars. It had been very quiet, Hadley's handling of the situation. Sheila Bitton had not been told of her uncle's death. They had left her there, with Dalrye to break the news when they were gone.

'I'd better not take her back to the house,' Dalrye had said. 'She'd only be in the way and she'd get hysterical ... he was her favourite. I know a great friend of hers, a girl who lives in Park Lane. I'll drive her over there and get Margaret to put her up for the night. Then I'll join you.'

The only thing that had surprised Rampole was the doctor's insistence that Hadley should see Arbor.

'Or, on second thoughts,' the doctor had added, 'you'd better let me see him. He still thinks I'm Chief Inspector Hadley. And if we try to explain matters at this stage, when he's in terror of his life, he may suspect all kinds of a put-up job.'

'I don't care who sees him, so long as he talks,' the chief inspector replied, testily. 'You can stay here and wait for him, if you like. But I'd much prefer that you came along with me. We can leave Mr Rampole to talk to him until we get back.'

'Tell them to bring him to Bitton's.'

'To Bitton's? But, good God, man! You don't want, 'I have rather a fancy,' said the doctor, 'to see how he acts there. Let poor Marks stay in the flat and direct them over when they get here.'

It had been arranged that way. Hadley's Daimler flashed through the quiet streets, and the hands of the illuminated clock on the dashboard pointed to nearly one o'clock as they reached Berkeley Square.

When they went up the shallow steps of the Bitton house, Hadley paused with his hand on the bell.

'I know only two quotations,' he said, quietly, 'but I'm going to tell one of them now. Do you know what it is?'

Dr Fell dropped the ferrule of his cane on the step with a hollow shock which had its echo.

"It must be confessed," ' he repeated, "It will be confessed; there is no refuge from confession but suicide, and suicide is confession."

Hadley rang the bell.

There was no sign of confusion in the house when the heavy door was opened. All the blinds had been drawn and the curtains closed, but every light was on. It was the absolute hush which was sinister. An old, grave-faced man ushered them into a massive blue entrance hall with, a crystal chandelier.

‘Chief Inspector Hadley, sir?’ the old man asked. ‘I am Hobbes, sir ; I telephoned you. Shall I take you upstairs?’ He hesitated as Hadley nodded. ‘Under such circumstances, sir, I have always heard that it is customary to summon a doctor. But Mr Bitton was obviously dead, and unless you wish it ..

‘It will not be necessary for the moment. Is Sir William up yet?’

‘I have not been able to rouse him, sir.’

‘Where is Mrs Bitton?’

‘In her room, sir. This way, if you please.’

The butler took them up a heavily carpeted stair, with bronze figures in the niches, and along a passage at the top. It was stuffy up here; and Rampole could distinctly smell the stale reek of cordite.

A bright light streamed out against the gloom of this upper hall At the door Hobbes stood aside for them to enter.

Here the odour of burnt powder: was stronger, but nothing seemed disturbed. It was a high room, with cornices and another long chandelier, severely furnished against a background of dull brown and yellow-threaded walls.

Lester Bitton lay sideways across the bed; they could see his feet from the door. Closer, they could see that he was fully dressed. The bullet had gone through the right temple and emerged about an inch above the left ear; following Hadley's glance, Rampole could discern the splintered place where it had lodged in the ceiling. The dead man's face was curiously peaceful, and there was very little blood. His outflung right hand, turned under at the wrist, held a Webley-Scott service automatic of the standard forty-five calibre army pattern.

Hadley did not immediately examine him. He spoke in a low voice to Hobbes.

'I think you told me you were in your pantry and heard the shot. You ran up here immediately, and found him just as he is. Did anybody else hear it?'

'Mrs Bitton, sir. She came in a moment later.'

'Where is Mrs Bitton's room?'

Hobbes indicated a door near the fireplace 'A dressing room, sir, which communicates with her own room.'

What did Mrs Bitton do?'

'She- stood looking at him for a long time, and suggested that I wake Sir William. Then she returned to her room.'

Hadley went over to the writing-table, looked at the chair beside it, and turned. 'Mr Bitton was out this evening. He must have returned here about eleven o'clock. Did you see him?'

'Yes, sir. He returned just before eleven, and went directly to the library. He asked me to bring him a cup of cocoa, and when I brought it he was sitting in front of the library fire. When I passed by, the door of the library, about an hour later, I went in and asked him if he wished anything more., He was still sitting in the same chair. When I spoke he said, "No, nothing more." Then he rose and walked past me and up the stairs.: For the first time Hobbes faltered, a trifle the man's self-control was amazing. 'That was the last I saw of him, sir, before .. before this.'

'How long afterwards did you hear the shot?'

'I am not positive, sir. Not more than five minutes, I should say, and probably less.'

'Did his manner seem strange?'

A slight pause before the answer. 'I am afraid so, sir. Mr Bitton has not been exactly himself for the past month. But there was nothing ... well, sir, excited about him.'

Hadley glanced down at the floor. The carpet was of so thick and smooth a nap that it was almost possible to trace the path a man had

taken, as though by footprints. They were standing near the door, and as Rampole followed the chief inspector's glance he could see with terrible clarity what Lester Bitton must have done. For Lester Bitton was a heavy and gigantic man; his footfalls were there where a lighter person's might not have been visible. First he had gone to the fireplace. Then he had walked to the reading-table facing the fireplace, the open drawer telling where the gun had come from. From there he had gone to the bureau, whose mirror was now tilted so that a tall man could look

at himself clearly. The impress of his feet, together, - was heavy there ; he must have stood for some time. Lastly he had walked straight to the bed, stood with his back to it so that he should fall there, and raised the automatic.

‘The gun is his own?’ Hadley asked.

‘Yes, sir. He kept it in that table drawer.’

Softly Hadley punched his fist into his palm, softly and steadily as lie looked about.

‘I want you to give me a complete account of everything Mr Bitton did to-day, so far as you know.’

Hobbes's hands plucked at the sides of his trousers.

‘Yes, sir. I observed him, sir, because I was a trifle concerned about his welfare. He left the house this morning at about half past ten, sir, and returned at noon. I believe he had been to Mr Philip’s flat’

‘Was he carrying anything when he returned?’

‘I believe he had a package of some sort, wrapped in brown paper. He left the house again early, in the afternoon. I know that he ate no lunch, sir. I reminded him of this when he returned, and he said he merely wanted a cup of cocoa sent to his room. He left before the unfortunate occurrence at Sir William’s car; the thief, sir.’

‘He left for the City?’

‘N-no, sir, I believe not. As he was leaving, Sir William, who intended to go to the City himself later, offered him a lift in the car. Major Bitton said he did not intend to go to his office. He .. he mentioned that he was going for a walk.’

'What was his manner then; nervous, upset ... ?'

'Well, sir, say restless.'

'When did he return?'

'I'm afraid I don't remember, sir. Mrs Bitton had brought back the horrible news about Mr Philip, and ...' Hobbes shook his head. He was biting at his lips now, trying to keep calm.

'That's all, thank you. I suggest that you make another effort to wake Sir William before you go.'

Hobbes bowed and closed the door behind him as he went out.

'I think,' Hadley said, turning to his companions, 'you two had better go downstairs. I've got to make an examination .. just in case ... and I warn you it won't be pretty. There's no good you can do. I want you to be there for Arbor when he arrives.'

Dr Fell grunted. He went over, bent across the body, and held his eyeglasses on while he had a brief look at it. Then he signalled to Rampole and waddled towards the door without a word.

In silence they descended the stairs. Rampole thought he heard behind them somewhere the click of a closing latch. He thought he saw a figure somewhere in the upper hall but his thoughts were so warped with stealth and murder, and the ghostliness of this ancient house, that he paid scant attention.

He followed Dr Fell down the lower hallway until they reached the library. It was another high room at the rear, done in white. Three walls, even around the window spaces, were built entirely of books; the white-painted lines of the shelves showed up startlingly against the dark old volumes. The fourth wall was cream-panelled, with a white marbled fireplace above which hung a full-length portrait of Sir William Bitton in a massive gilt frame. Flanking the fireplace, two long windows looked out on a garden.

Dr Fell stood in the middle of the dusky room, peering about curiously. A low fire flickered on the brass and irons a pink-shaded lamp burned on a table amid the heavy upholstered furniture round the fireplace.

'There's only one thing now,' the doctor said in a low voice, 'that I've got to be profoundly thankful for. Arbor still thinks I'm Hadley. I

may be able, to keep him away from Hadley altogether.

'Thankful? Why?'

'Look behind you,' the other said, nodding.

Rampole switched round. He had not heard Laura Bitton come in over, the thick carpet. And for a moment he scarcely recognized her.

She seemed much older and much quieter. Nor was she the vigorous young woman with the firm step and the level brown eyes who had walked so confidently into the Warders' Hall that afternoon. The eyes were a trifle red; the face fixed and dull.

'I followed you down,' she said, evenly. 'I heard you in the other room: The voice was queer, as though she could not quite understand yet that her husband was dead. 'You know all about it, don't you?'

'All about what, Mrs Bitton?'

'Oh, don't quibble. About Phil and me. I knew you would find out'

Dr Fell inclined his head. 'You should not have broken into his flat this afternoon, Mrs. Bitton. You were seen.'

She was not interested. 'I suppose so. I had a key, but I broke the lock, of the door with a chisel I found there to pretend it was a burglar; but it didn't go down. Never mind. I just want to tell you one thing... ' But she could not go on with it. She looked from one to the other of them, and shut her lips.

'Ma'am,' said the doctor, leaning on his cane, 'I know what you were going to say. You only realized just then how it would sound if you said it. You were going to say you never loved Driscoll. Ma'am, isn't it rather late for that?'

'Did you see what he had in his hand?' she asked.

'Yes,' he replied, as she closed her eyes 'Yes, ma'am, I did?

'Not the gun! The other hand, I mean. He got it out of the drawer. It was a snapshot of me.'

She spoke steadily, the brown eyes level and glazed, the jaw firm. 'I looked at it, and went back to my room. I have been sitting at the window in the dark, looking out.... If you think I'm trying to excuse myself, you're a fool. But since I saw him lying on that, bed, I think

I've seen a thousand, million, God knows how many images and they're all his. I've seen all my life with him. I can't cry now. I cried today, about Phil's death, but I can't cry now. I know I loved Lester. It was only because his ideas were so different from mine that I had to hurt him. Now I'll go. And maybe I can cry'

She paused in the doorway, a hand unsteadily on her rumpled brown hair.

'There was only one other thing,' she said, in a quiet voice : 'Did Lester kill Phil?'

For a long space the doctor remained motionless. Then he nodded his head.

'Keep that thought with you, ma'am,' he said:

The door closed behind her.

'You see?' Dr Fell asked. 'Or don't you? There's been enough tragedy in this house. I won't add another, Lester Bitton is dead and the Driscoll case is closed. If Hadley is satisfied, there needn't be any publicity. It can go down as "unsolved"; and Lester Bitton shot himself over money troubles, real or imaginary. And yet..."

He was still standing there brooding, under the vast walls of books, when Hobbes knocked at the door.

'Excuse me, sir,' said Hobbes. 'I have succeeded in waking Sir William. The key was on the inside of his door; I took the liberty of getting a pair of pliers and turning it from the outside. He is upset, sir,' and not very well. But he will be down presently, sir. And there is something else.... '

'Eh?'

'Two policemen are at the door, sir. A recent guest of ours is with them. A Mr Arbor.'

'H'm. . . . Got a little confidential work for you, Hobbes. Do you follow me?'

'Well, Sir?'

'Put those policemen somewhere out of sight. Tell Mr Arbor Mr Hadley is here in the library, and send him back to me. You needn't

inform Mr Hadley yet. Got it?'

'Yes, sir.'

There was a brief interval while Dr Fell stumped back and forth on the padded floor, muttering to himself. He turned sharply, as the door opened again, and Hobbes ushered in Julius Arbor.

18

Mr Arbor Hears a Voice

MR ARBOR was now imbued with a certain degree of calmness. But he was not at his ease. His glance had gone to the portrait of Sir William, a white eagle in the dusky room, and his discomfort seemed to grow. He had not let Hobbes take his hat or coat.

'Good evening, Inspector,' he said. 'Tritely, I suppose I ought to say good morning. It ... er ... I confess, Inspector, that your request to come here somewhat startled me. I...'

'Sit down there,' interrupted the doctor, leading him to the fire. 'You remember my colleague here?'

'Yes. Er .. yes, of course,' Arbor said, vaguely. He added, 'Is Sir William about?'

'No. That's it. Sit down.'

'I presume he has been informed of my purchase of the manuscript?' inquired Arbor.

'He has. But it doesn't matter now, you know. Neither of you will ever have it. It's burnt.'

The man's finger darted to his eyeglasses to keep them on. He said: 'You mean ... he ... somebody ... that is.' Arbor made an uncertain gesture. 'How was it destroyed? This is terrible, Inspector!'

The doctor drew out his pocket-book. Carefully he took from it the only part of the manuscript which remained, and stood weighing it thoughtfully.

'May. I ... may I see that, Inspector?'

He took the flimsy strip of paper in unsteady hands and held it close under the pink shaded lamp. For some time he studied it, back and

front. Then he looked up. 'Undoubtedly ... ah .. undoubtedly. Inspector, this is an outrage, you know! I own this.'

'Is it worth anything now?'

'Well...'

'I see that there's some hope for you, then. Now, I'll tell you how it is, Arbor,' said Dr Fell, in an argumentative voice suggestive of the elder Weller. 'If I were in your shoes, I should take that bit of paper, and put it in my pocket, and forget all about it for the present. You're in enough trouble as it is.'

'Trouble?' demanded Arbor, in rather too challenging a voice. The way he held the paper reminded Rampole of a man with stage-fright holding his notes on a lecture platform; calm in every way except that betraying flutter of the paper,

'Do you know,' continued the, doctor, pleasantly, 'that I've been of half a mind to let you cool off in gaol for a day or two? Why did you run away?'

'Run away? My dear man ... !'

'Don't try to deceive me,' said the doctor, in a sinister voice. It was a rather less blatant resurrection of Hamlet's father's Ghost. 'Scotland Yard sees all. Shall I tell you what you did?'

He proceeded to give an account of Arbor's behaviour after leaving the Tower. It was accurate enough in its details, but so neatly distorted that it sounded like the flight of a guilty man from the law.

'You said,' he concluded, 'that you had important information to give me personally. I am willing to listen. But I warn, you, man, that your position is very bad. And if you don't tell me the whole truth.

Arbor leaned back in the chair, breathing noisily. The strain of the day, the late hour, all his experiences since the murder, held him limp and nerveless.

'Ah yes,' he murmured. 'Yes. I perceive, Inspector, that circumstances have put me in a false light. I will tell you everything. I had intended to do so, but now I see I have no choice. You see, I felt that I was in a doubly unfortunate and precarious position, I feared that I might not be threatened only by the police, but by some criminal as well.'

I am ... a man of books, Inspector. My life is sheltered. I do not mingle with the more ... ah ... tempestuous portions of the world. You, who are a man of rough existence, and accustomed to hand-to-hand encounters with desperate ruffians, will not understand what I felt when I was faced with a bewildering problem of criminal nature.

'It began with that cursed manuscript. I came here for the purpose, of getting it from Bitton. Not unnaturally - a querulous note raised his voice - 'I wanted my own property; But I hesitated. Owing to the unpredictable eccentricities of Bitton's nature, I was placed in a distressing dilemma.. '

'I see,' said Dr Fell. 'What you, mean is that you were afraid of Bitton, and so you had to hire somebody to pinch it for you.'

'No!' Arbor insisted, gripping the arms of the chair in his earnestness. 'That is precisely what I do not mean. I feared you would think so, as your colleague indicated this afternoon. And I was careful to point' out to all of you there could have been no legal steps taken against me had I done so ... But, Inspector, I did not do it. I will take my oath on it.

'When the manuscript was stolen it was as much of a surprise to me as it was to Bitton. The first I heard of the theft, you see, was when he telephoned to my friends, the Spenglers, on Sunday night to ... ah ... to see where I was. But then ...'

He caught Dr Fell's cold eye, and there was a new vehemence in his tone.

'Then, considerably later the same night, I received another phone call at the Spenglers!'

'Ah!' grunted the doctor. 'From whom?'

'The person refused to give his name. But I was almost positive I knew whose voice it was. I thought it was the voice of young Mr Driscoll.'

Dr Fell jumped. He glared at Arbor, who returned his gaze with a dogged steadiness. Arbor went on:

'I reviewed everything in my mind, and I was sure. I had met this young man at dinner the week before, when I had made almost reckless remarks and exceedingly broad hints about the Poe manuscript. The only other persons who could have heard them were

Miss Bitton and Sir William ; they were the only others at the table. . . . Hence I was sure when this voice spoke. He asked me whether I was interested in a Poe manuscript belonging to Sir William Bitton, and gave such details of what I remembered having said, that I had no doubt. He asked me what price I should be willing to pay, no questions asked, if the manuscript were handed over to me.

‘I am ah. accustomed to rapid decisions and prompt action, Inspector. I was, sure I; was dealing, with a member of the family. The voice, it is true, was somewhat gruff; but I had little difficulty in seeing through, the disguise. Dealing with a member of the family was very different from dealing with a hired burglar. In case of trouble, there would be no scandal. In any case, there could be no prosecution against me.. This person naturally did not know I was the owner of the manuscript; nobody did. If, therefore, he had any ideas of blackmail in his mind after the theft, I could afford to smile. He would be the only one to take the risk.

‘I reviewed my position in a moment, Inspector, and I perceived that this was ... ah ... the easiest solution of, my difficulties. After the manuscript came to my hands, I could always drop a note to Sir William explaining my ownership, and referring him to my solicitors in case he did not believe me and wished to prosecute. I knew he would not do so. Besides, it was ... ah ... obvious,’ said Arbor, hesitantly, ‘that the amount of the commission ... ah ...’

‘You could promise him whatever he asked,’ said the doctor, bluntly. ‘And when you got the manuscript you could give him fifty pounds and tell him to whistle for the rest because you owned it and he was the only thief. And the fifty pounds would be much less than you'd have to pay Bitton.’

‘Considerably less. You state matters very succinctly, Inspector,’ Arbor nodded. ‘I agreed to what the unknown person said, and asked him whether he had the manuscript. He replied that he had, and again demanded how much I should pay for it. I mentioned rather a large sum. He agreed, and stated that he would name a rendezvous in the course of the next day. I was to be communicated with through the Spenglers. His stipulation was that I must never inquire into his identity.’

‘Well?’ prompted the doctor.

‘Naturally I attempted to trace the call, when he had hung up. It was impossible.’ ‘Go on.’

Arbor glanced over his shoulder. The nervousness had come back again.

‘The following day, today, I went about my affairs as usual. I paid a long-delayed visit to the Tower of London; And, I proceeded exactly as I have told you. When I was detained on my attempt to leave by the news of the murder, I was not unduly upset. I thought, indeed, that it would be, fascinating to watch Scotland Yard at work, and I assumed that it was some member of the underworld who had been killed.’

Again Arbor adjusted his glasses. ‘You will own, Inspector, that it came as a shock when you began your questioning of me by inquiring about Poe manuscripts. Even so, I flatter myself, that I was cool and ... you will pardon me ... triumphant over you. It was not until you mentioned the name of the dead man that He drew out the silk handkerchief and mopped his forehead. ‘My heart, Inspector; I could not see it would make me betray weakness. The possibilities had suddenly become menacing and horrible. Driscoll, at my order, had promised to deliver me that manuscript; and now he was murdered. I must assume even now that he was killed because of it. It occurred to me that in some heinous fashion, I might come into the case as accessory of some sort. A murder case.’ He shuddered. ‘I could not see how it might concern me directly, but there were any number of dangers. And where was the manuscript? You had not found it on Driscoll’s body. I wanted to forget it. As you saw, I wanted no search for it, above all things, because a search might uncover evidence to lead to me.’

‘So far,’ said the doctor, ‘very well. What then?’

Rampole was puzzled. If the doctor had insisted on anything in the case so far, he had insisted Driscoll would never attempt to dispose of the manuscript to Arbor. But here he was, nodding ponderously and fixing his sharp little eyes on the collector as though he believed every word. And Rampole, too, was compelled to believe Arbor. There was only the possible explanation that Driscoll, in a moment of panic, had made to Arbor an offer whose dangers he saw in a calmer moment the next day, and decided to drop the whole affair....

‘Now,’ said Arbor, clearing his throat now, Inspector, I come to the amazing, the incredible part of my whole story.. If you could have imagined... !’

‘Just after you left us in the Warders’ Hall,’ the doctor interposed, slowly, ‘you got the fright of your life, and it sent you out to Golders

Green in a, blind panic. What was it?,

Arbor seemed to have come to a jumping-off place in his narrative; he hesitated on the brink of the leap, tapping his glasses and peering over.

'Inspector,' he said, 'before I tell you what you must regard as completely incredible, let; me ask you a question' or two. In that room when you were questioning me, who was present?'

'H'm. There was Hadley, my my colleague; and Mr Rampole here ; and General Mason, and Sir Wil - Hold on, no! I'm wrong. Bitton wasn't there. He had gone up to Mason's rooms.'

Arbor stared. 'Bitton was at the Tower?'

'Yes.. But he wasn't in the room with us. Proceed.'

'The next thing,' Arbor said, carefully, 'is ... ah, what shall I say? ... an impression, rather than a question. Speaking with someone on the telephone is, in a certain sense, somewhat like speaking to a person in the dark. You hear the voice alone. There is no personality or physical appearance to distract you from your impressions,' of the voice itself. If you heard a voice on the telephone, without having seen the speaker, and later you meet the speaker in real life, you might not recognize him, because his appearance or his personality might destroy the impressions of the voice. But if you heard him in the dark... '

'I think I understand.'

'Very well. You dismissed me after the questioning, you will recall, and I went outside. The door of the room in which you had been talking to me was not quite closed. It was very dark and quite misty under the arch of the Tower there. I stood outside the door to accustom my eyes to the gloom. As it was, I was terrified. I could with difficulty make a good exit from the room. There was a; warder on duty, but he stood at some distance from me. I could hear you talking in the room I had left....

'Then Inspector,' said Arbor, bending forward with fist clenched, , 'I think I received the most horrible shock of my life. In the room I had not noticed it, I suppose, because the influence of personalities had overborne the impressions of my hearing.

'As I stood there in the dark, I heard a voice speak from the room. It

sounded little louder than a whisper or a mumble. But I knew that the voice I heard from that room was the same voice which had spoken to me on the telephone the day before, and offered to sell me the Poe manuscript.'

19 Under the Bloody Tower ?

This astounding intelligence did, not seem to affect Dr Fell in the least. His wonderfully sharp dark eyes remained fixed on Arbor.

'I suppose,' he said at length, 'the voice really, came from that room?'

'I assume so. There was nobody else about' who could have spoken, and the words were not addressed to me; they were a part of a conversation, it seemed to me.'

'What did the voice say?'

Again Arbor became tense. 'I cannot tell you. I have tried until I am ill, but I can't remember. You must understand the shock of hearing that voice ... He moved his arm, and the fist clenched spasmodically. 'To begin with, it was like hearing a dead man's voice. I had been willing to swear that the voice over the telephone belonged to Bitton's nephew. Then Bitton's nephew was dead. And suddenly this hideous whisper.. 'Listen, Inspector. I told you that the telephone voice seemed disguised; gruffer, as it were ; and I had attributed it to Driscoll. But this was the telephone voice. Of, that I am absolutely certain now. I don't know what it said. I only know that I put my hand against the wall of the tower and wondered whether I were going mad. I tried to visualize with whom I had spoken in the room, and I discovered that I could scarcely remember who had been there. I could not remember who had talked, or who had remained silent ; it was impossible to think which one of you had uttered what I heard.'

'Try to consider what my position was. I thought I had spoken to Driscoll; yet here was the voice. I had been speaking in that room to somebody ... certainly a criminal and in all probability a killer. I had outlined completely my position as owner of the manuscript. And somebody (I had forgotten which one) made it clear that if I had employed a thief to take my own property, he could expect only pay for his thievery and not the immense sum I had mentioned I would pay. I ... well, to tell you the truth, I was not thinking at all. I was only feeling. I felt certain, without knowing why, that the "voice" had killed Driscoll. Everything had gone mad, and, to make it worse, if I could

believe my ears this "voice" was one of the police.

'Otherwise I should have gone back immediately and confessed the whole business. But I was afraid both of having the police on my side, and of having them against me. I suppose I acted insanely. But I could think of nothing else to do. It was only late this evening, when I was certain I heard somebody trying to get into my cottage, that I determined to end the suspense, one way or the other.'

He sat back, bewildered, dejected, with his handkerchief again at his forehead.

'Still,' said Dr Fell, musingly, 'you could not swear the voice came from that room?'

'No. But'

'And there is not one word you can definitely remember its having said?'

'I'm afraid not.'

Dr Fell drew back his chins and pushed out his chest in a meditative fashion.

'Now, I've heard you out, Arbor, and I've got a few words to say. We're all alone here. Nobody has heard your story; but Sergeant Rampole and myself. We can forget it; that's our business when no crime has been done; but I shouldn't advise you to repeat it to anybody else. You would be in grave danger of being confined either in gaol or in a lunatic asylum.... Do you realize what you've said, he inquired, slowly lifting his cane to point. 'There were four people in that room. You must, therefore, accuse the voice as being either the chief inspector of the C. I. D., one of his highest and most trusted officers, or the deputy governor of the Tower of London. If you retract that statement, and decide that the voice actually was Driscoll, you lay yourself open to grave trouble in connexion with a murder case. Your status is that of madman or suspected criminal. Do you want to take your choice?'

'But I'm telling you the truth, I swear, before ... !'

'Man,' said Dr Fell, with a thunder of earnestness in his voice, 'I have no doubt you think you're telling the truth.. You heard a voice. The question is, what voice, and where did it come from?'

‘All right,’ Arbor said, despondently. ‘But what am I going to do? I wish I’d never heard of Poe or manuscripts or any ... besides, I’m in potential danger of my life... . What the devil are you laughing at Inspector?’

‘I was merely smiling,’ said Dr Fell, ‘at your fears for your own skin. If that’s all you’re worrying about, you can stop. We have the murderer, safely. The “voice” can’t hurt you, I guarantee that. And you don’t want to be tangled up in this affair any farther, do you?’

‘Good God, no! ... You mean you have caught .. !’

‘Arbor, the murder had no concern with your manuscript. You can forget it. You’ll feel like forgetting your fears, too, in the morning. The murderer is dead. Any inquest on Driscoll will be a private and perfunctory thing; it’ll be kept out of the press because it can’t serve any useful purpose. So you needn’t worry. Go to a hotel and get some sleep; And, if you hold your tongue, I’ll promise to hold mine.

‘But the man trying to get at me to-night ... !’

‘He was one of my own constables, to scare you into telling what you know. Run along, man! You never were in any danger in the world.’

‘But!’

‘Run along, man! Do you want Sir William to walk in here on you and make trouble?’

It was the most effective argument he could have used. Arbor did not even inquire too closely into the identity of the murderer. So long as the murderer had no designs on

him, his aura conveyed that he was averse to the gruesome details of a vulgar murder. When Dr Fell and Rampole walked with him to the front door they found Hadley, who had shortly dismissed the two constables, in the front hall.

‘I don’t think,’ the doctor said, ‘that we need detain Mr Arbor any longer. I have his story, and I’m sorry to say it doesn’t help us. Good-night, Mr Arbor.’

‘I shall walk,’- said Arbor with cool dignity, ‘to a hotel. Good-night, gentlemen.’

‘You dismissed him damned quickly,’ growled the chief inspector,

but, without much interest, 'after all the trouble he gave us. What did he say?'

Dr Fell chuckled. 'Driscoll phoned him and offered him the manuscript. He thought he might get mixed up as some sort of accessory ; . '

'But, good God! I thought you said..."

'Blind panic, my boy. Driscoll would never have done it, you can rest assured. And, as you pointed out, it was in blind panic that he burnt the manuscript.... Then Arbor had some sort of wild idea that he heard, the dead man's voice talking to him. You know, Hadley, if I were you I should never bring that man before a coroner's jury. He'd snake us all sound mad. ... But you don't need him, do you ?'

Oh no. He wouldn't have been called unless he turned up some evidence hearing on the murder.' The chief inspector rubbed a hand wearily over his eyes. 'Voices! Bah. The man's as neurotic as an old woman. And all the time that confounded manuscript's been only a red herring. , Well, I'm glad he didn't complicate matters by trying to identify the murderer's voice.'

'So am I,' said Dr Fell.

'Well, it's all over,' Hadley remarked, in a tired voice. 'The poor devil took the best way out. A few routine questions to go over, and we close the book. I've had a talk with the wife ... '

'What do you do with the case, then?'

Hadley frowned. His dull eyes wandered about the hall. 'I think,' he said, 'it will go down officially as "unsolved." We'll let it die down, and issue a bulletin to the Press Association to handle it lightly. There's no good in the stink of a public inquest, anyway.'

'By the way, where is Sir William?'

'In his room. Hobbes got his door; open and waked him up. Did he tell you?'

'Have you told him about?'

Hadley took a nervous turn about the hall. 'I've told him a little. But he can't seem to grasp it; the opiate hasn't worn off. He's sitting by a fire in his room, with a dressing-gown over his shoulders, as stupid as

an image. All he kept saying was, "See that my guests have refreshments."

'What are you going to do, then?'

'I've had to send' for Dr Watson, the police surgeon. When he gets here I'll have him fix something to wake the old man up; and then' Hadley nodded grimly - 'we'll share the duty of telling him everything.'

They could hear a night wind muttering in the chimneys. Rampole thought of that portrait, the white eagle face, standing with shoulders back, in the library. And he thought again of a lonely man in a lonely house; the old war-eagle now, huddled in a dressing-gown before a low fire in his room, and counting armies in the blaze.

Hobbes emerged from the rear of the hallway.

'At Sir William's suggestion, gentlemen,' he said, 'I have prepared some sandwiches and coffee in the library, and there is a decanter of whisky, if you should care for it..'

They moved slowly along the hall, back to the library, where a bright blaze was licking up round the coal in the grate, and a covered tray stood on a side-table.

'Stay with Sir William, Hobbes,' Hadley directed. 'If he wakens, come down after me. Admit the police surgeon when he arrives, and show him upstairs.'

They sat down wearily in the firelight.

'I got the final proof,' Hadley declared, as the doctor did things with a tantalus, 'when I talked to Mrs Bitton a few minutes ago.. She said she'd been down here and spoken' to you. She said that you were convinced her husband had killed Driscoll....'

'Did she? - What did she think about it?'

'She wasn't so sure, until I told her the full story; that's what took me so long upstairs. I couldn't get much out of her. She seemed almost as drugged as the old man. Her idea was that Bitton was quite capable of it, but that he'd be more likely to walk into Driscoll's rooms and strangle him rather than waylay him in a dark corner with a crossbow bolt. And she couldn't reconcile his putting the hat on Driscoll's, head. She was willing to swear he didn't think along those

lines; he wasn't an imaginative type.... Hadley frowned. 'It bothers me, Fell. She's quite right about that, unless Bitton had unsuspected depths.'

The doctor, who was mixing drinks with his back to Hadley, stopped with his hand on the syphon.

'I thought you were satisfied?'

'I am; I suppose. There's absolutely no other person who can fit the evidence. And what makes it certain ... Did you know Bitton had a gift for mimicry? I didn't, until she told me.'

'Eh?'

'Yes. His one talent, and he never employed it nowadays; he didn't think it was - well, fitting. But Mrs Bitton said he used to burlesque his brother making a speech, and hit him off to the life. He could easily have put in that fake telephone call"

There was a curious, sardonic expression on the doctor's face as he stood up.

'Hadley,' he said, 'that's an omen. It's coincidence carried to the nth degree. I couldn't have believed it, and I'm glad we didn't hear it at the beginning of the investigation ; it would only have confused us.'

'What are you talking about?'

'Let's hear the full outline of what Bitton did, as you read it.,

Hadley settled back with a chicken sandwich.

'Well it's fairly plain. Bitton had made up his mind to kill Driscoll when he returned from the trip. He was a little mad, anyhow, if his behaviour tells everything, and it explains what happened afterwards.

'I don't think he intended at first to make any secret of it. His plan was simply to go to Driscoll's flat and choke the life out of him; and he made up his mind to do it that morning. He was determined to see Driscoll, you know. He borrowed Sir William's key to be sure he could get into the apartment.

'He arrived there, and Driscoll was out. So he prowled through the apartment. In all likelihood he was looking for incriminating evidence against his wife and her lover. You remember the oil and the

whetstone on Driscoll's desk? The oil was fresh; Driscoll had probably been working on that crossbow bolt, and it was lying there conspicuously. Remember that the bolt had a significance to Bitton; it was one which he and his wife had bought together....'

Dr Fell rubbed his forehead. 'I hadn't thought of that,' he muttered; 'the omens are still at work. Carry on, Hadley'

'And he found the top-hat. He must have surmised that Driscoll- was the Mad Hatter, but that didn't interest him so much as a recollection of Driscoll's wish to die in a tophat. You see the psychology, Fell? If he'd merely run across a top-hat of Driscoll's, the suggestion mightn't have been so strong. But a hat belonging to his brother - a perfect piece of stage-setting ...'

'Suddenly, his plan came to him. There was no reason why he should suffer for killing Driscoll. If he stabbed Driscoll at some place which wouldn't be associated with Lester Bitton, and put the stolen hat on the body, he would have done two things: First, he would have put suspicion on the Mad Hatter as the murderer. But the hat-thief was the man he was going to kill ! ... and consequently, the police could never hang an innocent person for murder.

Secondly: he would have fulfilled Driscoll's bombastic wish

'Further, from his point of view the choice of that bolt as a weapon was an ideal one. It had its significance. to begin with. And, though Driscoll had stolen the bolt secretly from his house, he didn't know that. Seeing the bolt on Driscoll's desk, he naturally imagined that Driscoll had got it openly asked for it and that anybody in his own house would know it was in Driscoll's possession. Hence suspicion would be turned away from his own house! He couldn't have been expected to think that Driscoll had carefully concealed a theft of that trumpery souvenir, when it could have been had for the asking. Can you imagine what must have been his horror, then, when he found us suspecting his wife?'

The doctor took a long drink of whisky.

'You've got a better case than I' thought, my boy,' he said. 'The Gentleman who pulls the cords must have been amused by this one. I am listening.'

'So, in his half-crazy brain, he evolves a new plan. He knew Driscoll was going to the Tower at one o'clock, to meet Dalrye, because he had heard it at breakfast. He didn't know his wife was going there, of

course. His one idea was to get Driscoll alone. If Driscoll went to the Tower, he would be certain to be with Dalrye; and a murder might be devilish awkward.'

‘You can see what he did. He took the hat and the bolt home with him, and left the house early; before one o'clock. He phoned Dalrye from a public box, imitated Driscoll's voice, and got Dalrye away. At one o'clock he was at the Tower. But Driscoll didn't appear; Driscoll was twenty minutes late....'

Hadley drank a mouthful of scalding coffee and set down the cup. He struck his fist into his palm. ‘Do you realize, man, that, if we look back over our times in this case, Driscoll must have walked into the Tower of London no more than a few minutes, or more likely a few seconds, before Laura Bitton did? Driscoll was late; she was early. And as soon as Driscoll got up to General Mason's rooms he looked out of the window and saw Laura Bitton by Traitors' Gate. ... In other words, Lester Bitton, lurking about for a suitable opportunity to kill Driscoll as soon as he could, saw both of them come in. He hadn't bargained on, her. There was to be a meeting, clearly. For fear of detection, he couldn't strike until it was over.

‘He waited. As he had thought, a person of Driscoll's wild and restless nature, wouldn't sit cooped up' in General Mason's rooms. He would wander about, in any event. And he would certainly come down now, for his rendezvous with Laura.... Fell, when Driscoll came downstairs and met Laura at the rail, Bitton must have been concealed under the arch of the Bloody Tower, watching them.'

The doctor was sitting back, one hand shading his eyes. The fire had grown to a fierce heat now. -

‘He saw the interview, with what rage we can imagine. He heard Laura Bitton say she loved him...: and then, a thing which must have crazed him by its perverse irony, he saw Driscoll leave her, hurriedly and almost contemptuously, and walk towards him under the arch of the Bloody Tower. Driscoll had done more than loved his wife; he had scorned his wife. And now Driscoll was walking towards him in the fog, and the crossbowbolt was ready in Bitton's hand.'

Dr Fell did not take his hand away from his eyes ; he parted two fingers, and the bright eye gleamed suddenly behind his, glasses.

‘I say, Hadley ... when you, talked to Mrs Bitton, did she say Driscoll really did go under the arch of the Bloody Tower?’

'She didn't notice. She turned away and walked in the roadway - where, you remember, Mrs Larkin saw her, walking with her back to the Bloody Tower....'

'Ah!'

'She didn't conceal anything,' Hadley said dully. 'I thought, when I spoke to her, that I was talking to an automaton - a dead person, or something of the sort. Driscoll went under the arch. It was all over in a moment: Bitton's hand over his mouth, a wrench and a blow, and Driscoll died without a sound. And when Mrs Bitton walked through the arch a few seconds later, her husband was holding against the wall the dead body of her lover. When they had gone, he took off Driscoll's cap, opened the top-hat - it was an opera-hat, you know, and collapsible, so that it was easily concealed under a coat - and put it down over Driscoll's eyes. He went out quickly and flung the body over the rail, where it got that smash on the back of the head. Then he went out by one of the side gates, unobserved.'

When Hadley had finished, he did not immediately go on eating his sandwich. He stared at the sandwich queerly, put it down; and they were all very quiet. Over their heads, now, somebody was pacing with slow steps. Back and forth, back and forth.

They heard a clock strike a musical note; then, faintly, voices in the front hall, and the boom of the big door closing.

It echoed hollowly through the house. The steps upstairs hesitated, then resumed their slow pacing....

'That'll be the police surgeon,' said Hadley. He rubbed his eyes drowsily and stretched stiff muscles. 'A bit more routine work, and I'm going home to bed.'

'Excuse me,' interrupted a voice at the door. 'May I see you a moment?'

The tone was such that Hadley spun round. It began levelly, and then gave a sort of horrible jerk. Coming out of the shadows they saw Dalrye. His eyes, as he moved them from one to the other of these men, were glazed.

'Don't say anything!' Dr Fell suddenly boomed. 'For God's sake keep your mouth shut! You will think better of it - you'll...'

Dalrye put out his hand. 'It's no good,' he said. . His eyes fixed on

'I wish to give myself up, sir,' he said, in a clear voice. 'I killed Philip Driscoll.'

20

The Murderer Speaks

IN THE utter and appalled silence of that library, even thee footsteps upstairs seemed to have stopped as though they had heard him Dalrye mechanically yanked open his collar. His eyes were on the fire as he went on

'I didn't mean to kill him, you know. It was an accident. I shouldn't have attempted to conceal it afterwards; that was the mistake. I shouldn't have told you at all if it hadn't been for your suspecting Major Bitton ... and then his killing himself, and your being sure he'd done it.... I couldn't stand for that. He was - a - real friend, Phil never thought about anybody but himself. But Major Bitton He fumbled at his eyes. 'I've lost my glasses, and I can't see very, well without them.'

He stumbled over to the fire, sat down, and as he spread out his hands they saw he was shivering.

'You young fool,' Dr Fell said, slowly. 'You've ruined everything. I've been trying to cover you all, evening, ever since I saw that girl, of yours. There wasn't any sense in your telling. You've only brought more tragedy on this house.'

Hadley straightened himself up, almost as though he were trying to recover from a blow in the face.

'This isn't real,' he said. 'It can't be. Are you telling me, as a police officer, without any joking ...'

'I've been walking the streets for an hour,' the young man answered. 'When I kissed Sheila good-night over at her friends' place I knew it was the last time I'd ever see her outside the dock. And so I thought I couldn't tell you. But I realized I couldn't go on this way, either.' He put his head in his hands. Then an idea seemed to strike him and he peered round, 'Did somebody say he knew it already?'

'Yes,' snapped Dr Fell, grimly. 'And if you'd had the sense to keep your mouth shut...'

Hadley had taken out his notebook. His fingers were shaking and his voice was not clear. 'Mr Dalrye,' he said, 'it is my duty to warn you that anything you say may be taken down...,'

'All right,' said Dalrye. He peered blindly at the drink Rampole was holding out, and clutched it. 'Thanks. I can use that.... I, suppose there's no good telling you it was an accident, is there? He really killed himself, you know; that is, he jumped at me, and in the fight ... Christ knows, I didn't want to hurt him. I only - I only tried to steal that damned manuscript....'

He breathed noisily for a moment.

'This may be true,' the chief inspector said, studying him queerly. 'But I hope it's not. I hope you can tell me how you answered the telephone in Driscoll's flat at a quarter to two, and killed Driscoll at the Tower of London a few minutes later.'

Dr Fell rapped his stick against: the edge of the mantelpiece. 'It's out now, Hadley. The damage is done. And I may as well tell you that you've put your finger on the essential point. It's where your whole case went wrong... . You see, Driscoll was not killed at the Tower of London. He was killed in his own flat'

'He was ... Great God' Hadley said, despairingly. 'All this is nonsense!'

'No, it isn't,' said Dalrye. 'It's true enough, Why Phil came back to his flat I don't know; I can't imagine. I'd taken good care he should be at the Tower. That was why I faked the telephone call to myself. But I - I only wanted to keep him out of the way so that I could steal the manuscript.'

His trembling had almost ceased now; he was only dull and drowsily tired.

'Suppose we get this thing from the beginning,' said the chief inspector. 'You say you wanted to steal the Poe manuscript.... '

'I had to,' the other said.

'You had to?'

'Oh!' muttered Dalrye. His hand went to his eyes automatically, and found no glasses. 'Oh yes. I didn't tell you. It was all on the spur of the moment. Bing. Like that. I don't think I should ever have thought of

stealing it out of the house here. But when he telephoned me early Sunday evening at the, Tower he told me that when he'd pinched his uncle's hat he'd stolen the manuscript with it.'

‘You knew Driscoll was the hat-thief?’

‘O Lord’ ,said Dalrye, with a sort of feeble irritation. ‘Of course I did. Of course he'd come to me. I helped him. He - he always had to have help. And of course, you see, he'd have told me, anyway. Because one of his choicest ideas was to get a Yeoman Warder's hat from the Tower of

London. ’

‘By God and Bacchus!’ muttered Dr Fell. ‘I overlooked that. Yes, certainly., Any, respectable hat-thief would have tried to...’

‘Be’ quiet, will you?’, snapped Hadley. ‘Listen, Mr Dalrye. He told you about it ..? ’

‘And that's when I got the idea,’ Dalrye nodded -absently. ‘I was pretty desperate, you see. They were after me, and it would have come out, within a week. So I told Phil over the telephone to hang on to that manuscript ; not to stir until I found him a plan and to go round to the house Sunday night and find out what he could before he acted. And in the meantime... ’ He sat back in his chair. ‘I knew where Arbor was, over the week-end. I'd been out with Sheila Saturday night, and so of course I knew. I wouldn't have dared phone him if he'd been in this house ... ’

‘You phoned Arbor?’

‘Uh. Didn't he tell you? I was afraid he had recognized the voice, and I was panicky tonight when I heard he was coming in....’

Hadley stared sharply at Dr Fell. ‘What did Arbor mean, then? I thought you told me he said he was sure it was Driscoll ... ?’

‘He did,’ said the doctor. ‘But I'm afraid you didn't pay close enough attention to what Miss Bitton said to-night, Hadley. Don't you remember her telling us about how, Driscoll had played jokes on her, by telephoning and telling her he was Dalrye here; and she believed it? You've’ got a voice very much like Driscoll's, haven't you, my boy?’

‘If I hadn't had,’ muttered the other, ‘I couldn't have put this thing over. I'm no actor, you know. But if he could imitate me, then I could

imitate him, and talk to Parker on the telephone to change the appointment and send myself up to his flat.'

'Hold on!' snapped Hadley. 'This is getting ahead of me. You say that first you phoned Arbor and offered him the manuscript, when you didn't have it yet, and then. ... But why? Why did you want to steal it?'

Dalrye drained his glass. 'I had to have twelve hundred pounds,' he said, evenly.

Leaning back in his chair, he stared at the fire.

'Let me tell you a little about it,' he went on. 'My father is a clergyman in the north of England, and I'm the youngest of five sons. I got an education, but I had to work for my scholarships, because I wasn't one of those tremendously bright chaps. If I had anything, it was imagination, and I wanted - some day - and this is funny ... no, I won't tell you what I wanted. It was something I wanted to write. But imagination doesn't help you in passing examinations, and it wasn't easy going to keep at the top. I'd been doing some research work on the Tower of London, and I happened to meet General Mason. He liked me, and I liked him, and he asked me to become his secretary.'

'That was how I met the Bittons. It's odd ... but, you know, I admired Driscoll. He was everything I wasn't. I'm tall, and awkward, and near sighted. I was never good at games, either, and women thought I was - oh, nice and pleasant, and they'd tell me all about how they fell in love with other chaps.'

'Driscoll - well, you know him. He had the air. And it was the case of the brilliant meteor and the good old plodding cab-horse who helped him out of difficulties. And I told you I was flattered to have my advice taken. But then I met Sheila....'

'It's damned funny why she looked at me. Other women never did. They thought it was funny, too. -I mean Phil's friends. And by funny, I mean comical, this time. One nice young dandy made a remark about "Old, parson-face and the moron daughter of Bitton's." I didn't mind being called parson-face; they all did it. But the other ... I couldn't do anything then. I had to find another occasion, so I ran into him one night, and said I didn't like his face, and knocked it off. He didn't get out of the house for a week. But then they began laughing again, and said, "Good old Bob; he's a sly one," and they said I was after Sheila's money. That was awful. And it was worse when Sheila and I knew we loved each other, and told each other so, and the old man learned

about it.

‘He took me over for an interview and as much as said the same thing. I don't remember what I said, but I know I told him he could take his dirty money, well, you know. That surprised him. Sheila and I were going to be married, anyhow. Then he thought it over, and thought it over, and Major Bitton intervened. Somehow, I don't think the old man was so upset about what I said as I thought he'd be. He came down to see me, and said Sheila wasn't capable of looking after herself, and that if we'd promise to wait a year, and still felt the same way - there it was. I said that was all right, provided I did all the supporting of the new family without any help....

‘I'll skip over the next part. Phil said he could tell me a way to make some easy money, and everything would be fine. And I was pretty desperate; Bitton's "year" only meant - and we both knew it - that at the end of the time he'd say my prospects were no better, were they? And I couldn't - expect Sheila to wait for me when she had so many chances for a good match!

‘I got into a jam with my "money-making." Never mind that. It was my own fault. Phil . . .’

Dalrye hesitated. ‘That's neither here nor there. We were both in it, but I was the one who did the ... Anyhow, if it ever got to the old man's ears, I was through. And I had to raise twelve hundred pounds in a week.’

He leaned back in his chair and, closed his eyes.

‘Then I got this wild idea of stealing the manuscript from Phil and selling it to Arbor. It was insane. You know the scheme. I'd told him on Sunday night to phone me in the morning. He did wild-eyed. He was in some fresh difficulty. It was the - the wife matter, you know, but I didn't know it then. I had already impressed it on his mind that he had to conceal the manuscript; keep it in his rooms. It was so that I could get it out of the flat.

‘And he did. He tried putting it back in the old man's car - you know about that before he came to the Tower to see me. But my instructions had so impressed him that, before he came to the Tower, he returned to his flat and hid the manuscript at the back of the grate in his study.

‘Arranging the fake telephone call had been easy. The first one was genuine. When the second came through, I was in the record-room; I'd simply rung up Parker and spoken as Driscoll. I knew he would call

me on the speaking-tube. Then I would go to the phone again, say "Hallo Phil !" to myself, and answer myself in his voice, and Parker would hang up.

'But I had to work fast. The plan was, simple. I was going to leave the General's car at a garage in Holborn, hurry to Driscoll's flat, and pinch the manuscript. Then I was going to open a window, ransack the flat a bit, and steal a few odd things so that it would look like the work of a burglar. I knew Phil would never be blamed for stealing it from the old man; the old man would never know. The only danger Phil ran was in trying to return it. And, by God! if you think I hesitated to steal from the old man.... I'd pinch his shirt off his back.'

He took the bottle of whisky from the table and poured out almost half a tumbler. He was growing defiant, and swallowed the drink neat....

'It sounded good enough. I don't think Phil would ever suspect me. When I got to the flat and found he wasn't there, I had time enough to search. A phone call came from Parker at the Tower while I was searching. I made a mistake by answering it; but I was rattled: Still - later,' he choked a little, 'later it. gave an alibi. It was 'just before a quarter to two....

'Listen! I'd tumbled the study about some, because at first I didn't think of looking in the grate. But I did look there, and found it. I wasn't hurrying, because I thought Phil was safely at the Tower: - I examined, it carefully, and put it in my pocket. I was just going on to rumple up the room some more ..' 'I turned round ; heard a noise or, 'something - I don't know. And there was Phil in the doorway, looking at me. I knew he'd been, standing there, and he'd seen everything.'

Dalrye's fixed, absent look had turned horrible.

'You never saw Phil in one of his rages, did you? When he had them, he was a crazy man. He tried to kill a man once, with a penknife, because the man made fun of something he was wearing. He would go what they call - berserk, and he was as dangerous as hell

'I don't think I've ever heard anybody curse in my life the way he did; then. It was so violent it sounded ... I don't know how to describe it ... obscene. He had a brown cap, all pulled over one ear. I always knew when he would jump. We'd had boxing-bouts with soft gloves several times; but I stopped sparring with him because I was a better boxer, and when I got' inside his guard too smartly he'd fly off the handle and tell me he wanted to fight with knives. I saw him crouch

down. I said, "Phil, for God's sake don't be a fool - " and he was looking round for something and he saw it. It was that crossbow bolt, lying on a low bookcase beside the door. Then he jumped.

'I tried to dodge aside and get him by the collar, the way you might a charging-dog. But he landed full. We whirled around... I I don't exactly know what happened. I heard a chair hit the floor. And the next thing I knew we smashed over together, with me on top of him, and I heard a sort of dull crunch.... And just after that ...

'F-Funny,' Dalrye said wildly. 'When I was a kid I had a rubber toy once that wheezed and squeaked when you punched it. I thought of that. Because the noise he made was just like that toy, only a hundred times louder, and more horrible. Then there was a kind of hiss and gurgle of the toy getting the air in it again. And he didn't move any more.

'I got up. He'd driven that bolt into himself, or my falling on him had done it, until the point hit the floor. The back of his head had hit the iron fender when we went over.'

Dalrye sat back with his hands over his eyes.

21

Unsolved

FOR a moment he could not go on. He reached blindly after the whisky again. Rampole hesitated ; and then helped him

pour some more.

'I don't understand,' Dalrye muttered in a dull voice,' 'I don't know why he came back... .

'Perhaps,' said Dr Fell, 'I can tell you. Sit quietly for a moment, boy, and rest yourself.... Hadley, do you see now?'

'You mean .?'

'I mean this. When Driscoll stood there at the Traitors' Gate, at the Tower of London, talking to Mrs Bitton at one-thirty, he remembered something. The recollection of it startled him nearly out of his wits. He said he had to go and attend to it. What did he remember?'

'Well?' queried Hadley.

‘Think back! He was talking to her, and he mentioned something, about his uncle. That was what made him remember, for his outburst followed it. Think!’

Hadley sat up suddenly. ‘My God! it was the afternoon of his uncle’s monthly visit to him!’

‘Exactly. Bitton didn’t intend making the call, but Driscoll didn’t know that. He’d forgotten that visit. And Bitton had a key to his flat. He would walk in there, and there, in the flat with no attempt to hide them, were the two hats he had stolen. That was bad enough. But if Bitton grew suspicious, and searched, and found his manuscript

Hadley nodded. ‘He had to get back to his flat to head off Sir William.’

‘He couldn’t explain to Laura Bitton, you see. And, if he could, he couldn’t take the time. So he did what many another man has done with a woman. He shooed her away and said he would join her in five minutes. Of course, with out any idea of doing it....’

‘And do you see what he did? Remember your plan of the Tower, Hadley. He couldn’t walk along Water Lane towards the main gate. That way led only to the way out; he couldn’t have pretended an errand, and it would have roused the woman’s suspicions. So he went the other way along Water Lane, and out of the other gate to Thames Wharf - unnoticed in the fog. That was at half past one.

‘You yourself told me, Hadley, that by Underground a person could go to Russell Square in fifteen minutes or even less. And it seemed to me, if Mrs Bitton could do it at five o’clock, why couldn’t Driscoll have done it at one-thirty? He would arrive at the flat, in short, about ten minutes to two or a trifle later. the time the police surgeon said he died. But, you see, where all your calculations went wrong was in assuming Driscoll had never left the Tower. The possibility never entered your head. I don’t think we should have found a warder who saw him go out, even if we had tried, at that side gate. But the thing simply didn’t occur to anybody.’

‘But he was found on the Traitors’ Gate! I ... Never mind,’ said Hadley. ‘Do you feel like going on, Dalrye?’

‘So that was it,’ the other said, dully. ‘I see. I see now. I only thought he might have suspected me....’

‘Let me tell you what I did. He was dead. I saw that. And for a

second I went into a sheer panic. I saw that I'd committed a murder. I had already prepared the way for a theft, and I was in deeply enough, but here was a murder. Nobody would believe it had been an accident. And where I made my mistake was this: I thought Driscoll had told them at the Tower he was coming back there! I could only imagine that they knew! And I had already definitely proved that I was at the flat, because I'd spoken to Parker on the telephone. I thought Driscoll had just changed his mind, and returned - and there I was with the body, when everybody knew we were both there.'

He shuddered.

'Then my common sense came back all in a rush. I had only one chance. That was to get his body away from this flat, somehow, and dump it somewhere out in the open. Somewhere, say, on the way to the Tower - so that they would think he'd been caught on the way back.

'And it all came to me in a flash - the car. The car was in that garage, not far away. The day was very foggy. I could get the car and drive it into the courtyard with the side-curtains on. Phil's body was as light as a kitten. There were only two flats on the floor; and the windows overlooking the court were blank ones; with the fog to help me, there wasn't great danger of being seen Dr Fell looked at Hadley. 'Quite right. The chief inspector was positive on that point, too, when he was considering how Mrs Bitton could have got out of the flat. I think he remarked that a Red Indian in a war bonnet could have walked out of that court without being observed. It was suggestive.' 'Well ... ' Again Dalrye rubbed his eyes unsteadily. 'I hadn't much time. The [thing to](#)

do was to save time by shooting over to the garage by the Underground - I could do it, with luck, in two minutes, where it would have taken me ten to walk to get the car, and come back for the body.

'I don't know what sort of face I put up in front of those garage people. I told them I was going home, rolled out, and shot back to the flat. If I'd been arrested then ... ' He swallowed hard. 'I took up Phil's body and carried it out. That was a ghastly time; carrying that thing. My God ! I nearly fell down those little steps, and I nearly ran his head through the glass door. When I'd got him stowed in the back of the car, under a rug, I was so weak I thought I hadn't any arms. But I had to go back to the flat to be sure I hadn't overlooked anything. And when I looked round, I got an idea. That top-hat. If I took that along, and put it on Phil ... why, you see, they would think the Mad Hatter

had killed him! Nobody knew who the hat-thief was. I didn't want to get anybody else in trouble, and that way it was perfectly safe ...'

'The chief inspector,' said Dr Fell, 'will have no difficulty understanding you. You needn't elaborate. He had just finished outlining the same idea himself, as being the murderer's line of thought, before you came in. What about the crossbow bolt?'

'I - I left the bolt ... you know where. You see, I'd never seen the damn thing before. I didn't know it came from Bitton's house. I simply assumed it was one of Phil's possessions and couldn't do anybody harm. I didn't see the Souvenir de Carcassonne, because you know why. It was hidden.'

Dalrye's nostrils grew taut. His hands clenched on his knees and his voice went high. 'But one thing I remembered before I left that flat. I remembered that manuscript in my pocket. I might have killed Phil. I might have been the lowest swine on earth, and I was pretty sure I was. But, by God! I wasn't, going to put dirty dollars in my pocket by selling that manuscript to Arbor now. It was in my pocket. I took it out. I was so wild that I was going to tear it up and take a handful of the pieces along to throw in Bitton's face. But if I tore it up here ... oh, well. They'd find the pieces, and there wasn't any use doing Phil dirt, even if I had killed him. I knew I was wasting time, but I touched a match to it and threw it in the grate.... I had the top hat, squashed flat, under my coat, and I thought I'd attended to everything.'

'You should have put back the fender in its place,' said Dr Fell. 'Nobody, merely searching that flat could have shoved a solid iron fender round the way you did when you had your fight with Driscoll. Well?'

'Then,' said Dalrye, reaching automatically after the whisky, 'then I had the first of my two really horrible shocks. When I was just getting outside' the door of the flat, I ran into the porter. I said, "Ha, ha, or something of the sort, and told him what a good fellow, he was, and for no reason at all I handed him half-a-crown. He walked out to the car with me....'

'Son,' said Dr Fell, with, a sudden grunt, 'you told an unnecessary lie to-day, and that car gave you away. When you were telling your story to us at the Tower this afternoon, you said you had never taken the car to the flat at all. You said when you left the flat you had to go to the garage and get it, and then start home. Still, I suppose you couldn't say anything else. But when Mr Hadley here explained this evening

about your having the car there, as the porter told him. .. No matter. Then?'

'I drove away. I'd put the top-hat on Phil, and stuffed his cap into my pocket. All I had to do was find a side lane somewhere down near the Tower, and pitch him out in the - fog. I didn't bother about fingerprints, for, as God is my judge, I'd never touched that crossbow bolt.... And then, just as I'd laid my plans, and I was getting away from Bloomsbury, do you know what happened?'

'Yes,' said Hadley. 'You met General Mason.'

'Met him? Met him? Do you think I'd have stopped if I'd seen him? The first thing I knew he'd hopped on the running board, and there he was grinning at me, and saying what a godsend this was, and telling me to get over in the front seat, so that he had room to shove in beside me....

'I stopped the car dead. I felt as though the whole car started to collapse under me. I tried to move, and my foot, jumped so much on the accelerator that I stalled the car. Then I turned my, head away and glared out of the side as though I were looking at a tyre.

'Then the car got started somehow. I could hear the General talking, but I don't remember anything he said. He was in a very good humour, I know, and that seemed, to make it worse.

'I was headed for destruction now I could- see that. We should go straight back to the Tower, and no power this side of hell could change it. Straight back.... Excuse me a second ... a drink. Funny this stuff doesn't seem to have any effect... A few drinks, will get, me tight, usually. ;

'I had, during that time, about twenty minutes to think and think hard. I'd thought it must be hours since I'd seen Phil lying there. But when I looked at my watch I couldn't understand ; it was only eight minutes past two. And all the time my brain was going like a machine shop I was talking to the General - I don't know what we talked about. It began to dawn on me that I had one chance. And that if I worked that chance I might have a real alibi... .'

'You see? If I could get inside the Tower grounds, and dump the body somewhere without detection, no sane person would ever believe I had ridden from town beside General Mason with a corpse in the rear of the car. They would believe, it suddenly dawned on me, that Driscoll had never left the Tower....'

‘I had to nerve myself for one last effort. I told the General about the “fake” telephone call that had lured me away; and I wondered what it was all about...’

‘Then we were inside the Tower grounds as two-thirty struck. I had calculated it neatly, and I knew the place. If there were nobody else about as we went along Water Lane I knew what I should do. You were quite right, Doctor, in saying that anybody would think of Traitors’ Gate as the place to hide a corpse on a foggy day. And this was the place, because I could stop there without suspicion.

‘You see?’ Dalrye demanded, leaning forward eagerly. ‘I had to let the General out opposite the, gate to the Bloody Tower. I waited until he was well up under the archway on his way to the King’s House, and then I acted. I opened the rear door, tossed the body over the rail, and was back in the car in a second, driving on....

‘But, my God ! I cut it fine! The General, on his way up, remembered an errand or something in St Thomas’s Tower, and he discovered the body. That - that’s about all, sir. There’s - there’s only one other thing. With this terrible thing over me, I’d forgotten about the money Phil had the money I owed to.... Well, I’d forgotten it, anyway. When the General sent me after the doctor, and the rest of it, I had to go up to my room to get something to steady my nerves. The reaction was too much. There was a letter on my table. I don’t remember opening it; I don’t even know why I opened it. I found myself standing with a brandy and soda in my hand, and the letter in front of my face. The letter said,’ suddenly Dalrye gagged, as though he were swallowing medicine, ‘the letter said, “Don’t worry any more about it. It’s paid. Don’t mention this to my brother, and don’t be such a quixotic young fool again.” It was signed Lester Bitton.’

Dalrye got up out of his chair and faced them. He was flushed and his eyes burned brightly.

‘I’m drunk’ he said, wonderingly. ‘I’m drunk. I hadn’t noticed it, not till this; minute. Lester Bitton got rid of what I owed, and never said a word. And when you accused him to-right - and he shot himself - you see why I had to tell you....’

He stood straight, a little wrinkle between his brows.

‘I told you I was a swine, he went on in an even voice, ‘but I’m not so bad as that. I know what it means. It means the rope. They, won’t believe me, of course, after what I did to cover myself; and I can’t

blame them. They shoot you out of a door, and it's all over in a few seconds.... I can't think how I came to be so drunk. I don't drink much, as a rule.... What was I saying? Oh yes. If you hadn't blamed it on Major Bitton, if you gave out that you hadn't been able to find out who the murderer was, I'd have kept quiet. Why not? I love Sheila. Some day I might have ... Never mind. I'm not going to let you think I'm pitying myself. It's only that I appreciate people who are kind to me. I never had much kindness. People all thought I was too much of a joke. But, by God old joke parson-face had the police guessing, didn't he? Momentarily there was a blaze in his face. 'Old - joke - parson-face!' said Robert Dalrye.... The fire was sinking now. Dalrye, his hand clenched, stared across the dusky room. He had spoken for a long time. There was a faint hint of dawn in the windows towards the garden.

Hadley rose quietly from his chair.

'Young man,' he said, 'I have an order for you. Go out into one of the other rooms and sit down. I'll call you back in a moment. I want to speak to my friends. There is one other thing. On no account speak a word to anybody until you are called back.'

'Oh, well,' said Dalrye. 'Oh, well. Go ahead and phone for your Black Maria, or whatever you use. I'll wait... By the way, there was something I didn't tell you. I'm afraid I nearly scared that poor devil Arbor into a fit. I didn't mean to. I was in the Warders' Hall on the other side of the Byward Tower, where the visitors were detained when he was coming out from your conference. And I was talking to your sergeant, only about ten feet away from Arbor. He hadn't recognized my voice before, but I was afraid he did then. It nearly killed him.... I say! I feel as though I had no legs. I hope I'm not staggering. That would be the devil of a way to go to gaol. Excuse me....'

With his shoulders back, he moved with careful steps towards the door.

'Well?' asked Dr Fell, when he had gone.

Hadley stood before the dying fire, a stiff military figure against the white-marble mantelpiece, and in his hand were the notes he had taken of Dalrye's recital. Hadley hesitated. There were lines drawn slantwise under his eyes; he shut his eyes now.

'I told you,' he said, quietly, 'I was getting old. I am sworn to uphold the law. But I don't know. I don't know. The older I get, the more I

don't know. Ten-years, ago I should have said, "Too bad, and ... You know what I'm thinking, Fell. No jury would ever believe that boy's testimony: But I do.'

'And without speaking of Lester Bitton,' said the doctor, 'the case can remain unsolved. Good man, Hadley! You know what I think. If this is a tribunal, will you put it up to a vote?'

'Lord help me,' said Hadley, 'I will. Well, Fell?' He assumed a stern air, but a curious, wise, ancient smile crept about his mouth. 'Dr Fell, your vote?'"Unsolved," he said. 'Mr Rampole?'

"Unsolved," said Rampole instantly.

The dying firelight lit Hadley's face as he half turned.; He upturned his hand; the white note-sheets fluttered from it and drifted down into the blaze. They caught fire and leaped in a puff. Hadley's hand remained motionless, the ancient, wise smile still on his face.

"Unsolved," ' he said.